ENGLISH POETRY

[ITS BACKGROUND & DEVELOPMENT]

B. R. MULLIK

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By

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PREFACE

I have great pleasure in placing in the hands of the students of Engling Literature the first of the series of my books dealing with the main forms of Literature—Poetry, Drama, Novel and Prose. This series is in continuation of my previous book, *English Literature —Its Background and Development*, in which all these forms are dealt with together rather briefly and in an outline.

In this book, *English Poetry—Its Background and Development*, detailed information has been given about the various poetic movements from the earliest to the modern times. An important feature of this book is that the major poets, who are generally prescribed in universities, have been thoroughly dealt with, and their main characteristics fully explained, so that the student can safely depend upon it as a useful compassion and guide for the purpose of examination.

I have every hope that this book will serve a useful purpose and satisfy the long-felt need of the students of English Literature in Universities especially in countries where English is taught as a foreign language.

Saraswati Bhawan,
Agra.
March 10, 1964.

B. R. MULLIK

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CHAPTER I

CHAUCER AND THE MIDDLE AGES

The earliest phase of English poetry started with the Anglo-Saxon literature of the Angles and Saxons (the ancestors of the English race) much before they occupied Britain. English was the common name and tongue of these tribes. Before they occupied Britain they lived along the coasts of Sweden and Denmark, and the land which they occupied was called Engle-land. These tribes were fearless, adventurous and brave, and during the later years of Roman occupation of Britain, they kept the British coast in terror. Like other nations they sang at their feasts about battles, gods and their ancestral heroes, and some of their chiefs were also bards. It was in these songs of religion, wars and agriculture, that English poetry began in the ancient Engle-land while Britain was still a Roman province.

Though much of this Anglo-Saxon poetry is lost, there are still some fragments left. For example, *Widsith* describes continental courts visited in imagination by a far-wandering poet ; *Waldhere* tells how Walter of Aquitaine withstood a host of foes in the passes of the Vosgas ; the splendid fragment called *The Flight at Finnesburg* deals with the same favourite theme of battle against fearful odds ; and *Complaint of Deor* describes the disappointment of a lover. The most important poem of this period is *Beowulf.* It is a tale of adventures of Beowulf, the hero, who is a champion and slayer of monsters ; the incidents in it are such as they may be found in hundreds of other stories ; but what makes it really interesting and different from later romances, is that it is full of all sorts of references and allusions to great events, to the fortunes of kings and nations. There is thus an historical background.

After the Anglo-Saxons embraced Christianity, the poets took up religious themes as the subject-matter of their poetry. In fact, a major portion of Anglo-Saxon poetry is religious. The two important religious poets of the Anglo-Saxon period were **Caedmon** and **Cynewulf.** Caedmon sang in series the whole story of the fate of man, from the Creation and the Fall to the Redemption and the Last Judgment, and within the large framework, the Scripture history. Cynewulf's most important poem is the *Crist*, a metrical narrative of

leading events of Christ's ministry upon earth, including his return to judgment, which is treated with much grandeur.

Anglo-Saxon poetry is markedly different from the poetry of the next period—Middle English or Anglo-Norman period—for it deals with the tradition of an older world, and expresses another temperament and way of living ; it breathes the influence of the wind and storm. It is the poetry of a stern and passionate people, concerned with the primal things of life, moody, melancholy and fierce yet with great capacity for endurance and fidelity.

The Norman Conquest (1066) inaugurated a distinctly new epoch in the literary as well as political history of England. It awakened a wholesale awakening of national life. The people were suddenly inspired by a new vision of a greater future. They became united in a common hope. In course of time the Anglo-Saxons lost their initial hostility to the new-comers (the Normans, who belonged to Normandy in France), and all became part and parcel of one nation. The Normans not only brought with them soldiers and artisans and traders, they also imported scholars to revive knowledge, chroniclers to record memorable events, minstrels to celebrate victories, or sing of adventure and love.

The great difference between the two periods—Anglo-Saxon period (670-1100) and Anglo-Norman period (1100-1500), is marked by disappearance of the old English poetry. There is nothing during the Anglo-Norman period like *Beowulf* or *Fall of the Angels*. The later religious poetry has little in it to recall the finished art of Cynewulf. Anglo-Saxon poetry, whether derived from heathendom or from the Church, has ideas and manners of its own ; it comes to perfection, and then it dies away. It seems that Anglo-Saxon poetry grows to rich maturity, and then disappears, as with the new forms of language and new influences, the poetical education started again, and so the poetry of the Anglo-Norman period has nothing in common with the Anglo-Saxon poetry. With the coming of the Normans, though the English language was thrown into the background, some works were composed in it, yet they echoed in the main the sentiments and tastes of the French writers, as French was the supreme arbiter of European literary style.

The most popular form of poetical literature during the Middle Ages was the romances, which treated romantically of heroes and heroines of by gone days. These romances are notable for their stories

rather than their poetry, and they, like the drama afterwards, furnished the chief mental recreation of time for the great body of the people. These romances were mostly borrowed from Latin and French sources. They dealt with the stories of King Arthur. The War of Troy, the mythical doings of Charlemagne and Alexander the Great. Most of them were written anonymously.

William Langland (1332 ?......?). One of the greatest poets of the Middle Ages was William Langland, and his poem, *A Vision of Piers the Plowman* holds an important place in English literature. In spite of its archaic style, it is a classic work in English literature. This poem, which is a satire on the corrupt religious practices, throws light on the ethical problems of the day. The character assumed by Langland is that of the prophet, denouncing the sins of society and encouraging men to aspire to a higher life. He represents the dissatisfaction of the lower and more thinking classes of English poetry, as Chaucer represents the content of the aristocracy and the prosperous middle class. Although Langland is essentially a satiric poet, he has decided views on political and social questions. The feudal system, under which the king gave land to the nobles in return of military service in time of need, and who employed the peasants and labourers to till the land, is his ideal ; he desires no change in the institution of his days, and he thinks all would be well if the different orders of society would do their duty. Like Dante and Bunyan, he ennobles his satire by arraying it in a garb of allegory ; and he is intensely real.

John Gower (1325? —1408). Gower occupies an important place in the development of English poetry. Though it was Chaucer who played the most important role in this direction, Gower's contribution cannot be ignored. Gower represents the English culmination of that courtly medieval poetry which had its rise in France two or three hundred years before. He is a great stylist, and he proved that English might compete with the other languages which had most distinguished themselves in poetry. Gower is mainly a narrative poet and his most important work is *Confession Amantis*, which is a form of conversation between the poet and a divine interpreter. It is an encyclopaedia of the art of love, and satirises the vanities of the current time. Throughout the collection of stories which forms the major portion of *Confession Amantis*, Gower presents himself as a moralist. Though Gower was inferior to Chaucer, it is sufficient that they were certainly fellow pioneers, fellow school masters, in the task

of bringing England to literature. Up to their time, the literary production of England had been exceedingly rudimentary and limited. Gower, like Chaucer, performed the function of establishing the form of English as a thoroughly equipped medium of literature.

CHAUCER

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340/43—1400) is the greatest poet of the Middle Ages. It was, in fact, Chaucer who was the real founder of English poetry. Unlike the poetry of his predecessors and contemporaries, which is read by few except professed scholars, Chaucer's poetry has been read and enjoyed continuously from his own day to this, and the greatest of his successors from Spenser and Milton to Tennyson and Arnold, have joined hands in praising it. *In The Faerie Queen*, Spenser wrote in honour of Chaucer :

> Dan *Chaucer*, well of English undefiled
> On Fame's eternal bedroll worthy to be filed

Dryden, who was the first to give to Chaucer the title of the Father of English poetry, a title which has not yet been seriously questioned so far, wrote in his *Preface to the Fables* :—

"In the first place, as he is the father of English poetry, so I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil. He is a perpetual fountain of good sense ; learned in all sciences ; and therefore speaks properly on all subjects. As he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off ; a continence which is practised by few writers, and scarcely by any of the ancients, excepting Virgil and Horace."

Warton, an eighteenth century critic, writing in his *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser* in 1754, remarked : "I cannot dismiss this section without a wish, that this neglected author whom Spenser proposed in some measure as the pattern of his language, and to whom he is not a little indebted for many noble strokes of poetry, should be more universally and attentively studied............We look upon his poems rather as venerable relics, than as finished patterns ; as pieces calculated rather to gratify the antiquarian than the critic. When I sat down to read Chaucer with the curiosity of knowing how the first English poet wrote, I left him with the satisfaction of having what later and more refined ages could hardly equal in true humour, pathos, or sublimity."

Dr. Johnson in *The History of the English Language* (1755) observed : "The history of our language is now brought to the point at

which the history of our poetry is generally supposed to commence, the time of the illustrious *Geoffrey Chaucer*, who may perhaps, with great justice, be styled the first of our versifiers who wrote poetically."

Coleridge who was fascinated by the cheerful temperament of Chaucer, observed in his *Table Talk* (1834) : "I take unceasing delight in Chaucer. His manly cheerfulness is especially delicious to me in my old age. How exquisitely tender he is, and yet how perfectly free from the least touch of sickly melancholy or morbid drooping. The sympathy of the poet with the subjects of his poetry is particularly remarkable in Shakespeare and Chaucer; but what the first affects by a strong act of imagination and mental metamorphosis, the last does without any effort, merely by the inborn kindly joyousness of his nature. How well we seem to know Chaucer! How absolutely nothing do we know of Shakespeare."

Leigh Hunt who was greatly impressed by the modesty of Chaucer, wrote in *Wit and Humour* (1846) : "The father of English poetry was essentially a modest man. He sits quietly in a corner, looking down for the most part and meditating ; at other time eyeing everything that passes, and sympathising with everything ; chuckling heartily at a jest, feeling his eyes fill with tears of sorrow, reverencing virtue, and not out of charity with vice. When he ventures to tell a story, it is as much under correction of the Host as the humblest man in the company ; and it is no sooner objected to, than he drops it for one of a different description."

Ruskin who considered Chaucer as the true representative of a typical Englishman, remarked in *Lecturers on Art* (1870) : "For there is one strange, but quite essential, character in us—ever since the Norman Conquest, if not earlier—a delight in the forms of burlesque which are connected in some degree with the foulness of evil. I think the most perfect type of a true English mind in its best possible temper, is that of Chaucer ; and you will find that, while it is for the most part full of thoughts of beauty, pure and wild like that of an April morning, there are, even in the midst of this, sometimes momentarily jesting passages which stoop to play with evil—while the power of listening to and enjoying the jesting of entirely gross persons, whatever the feeling may be which permits it, afterwards degenerates into forms of humour which render some of the greatest, wisest, and most moral of English writers now almost useless for our youth. And yet you will find that whenever Englishmen are wholly without this instinct, their genius is comparatively weak and restricted.

James Russel Lowell, writing on Chaucer in 1870, observed: "Chaucer is the first who broke away from the dreary traditional style, and gave not merely stories, but lively *pictures* of real life as the ever-renewed substance of poetry. He was a reformer, too, not only in literature, but in morals. But as in the former his exquisite tact saved him from all eccentricity, so in the latter the pervading sweetness of his nature could never be betrayed into harshness or invective. There is no touch of cynicism in all he wrote......

"One of the world's three or four great story-tellers, he was also one of the best versifiers that ever made English trip and sing with a gaiety that seems careless, but where every foot beats time to the tune of thought......He found our language lumpish, stiff, unwilling; he left it enriched with the longer measure of the Italian and French poets.

"Chaucer seems to me to have been one of the most purely original of poets, so much so in respect of the world that is about us as Dante in respect of that which is within us. There had been nothing like him before, there has been nothing since. He is original, not in the sense that he thinks and says what nobody ever thought and said before, and what nobody can ever think or say again, but because he is always natural; because, if not always absolutely new, he is always delightfully fresh, because he sets before us the world as it honestly appeared to Geoffrey Chaucer, not as a world as it seemed proper to certain people that it ought to appear."

Matthew Arnold in *The Study of Poetry* (1880) observed: "If we ask ourselves wherein consists superiority of Chaucer's poetry over the romance poetry—why it is that in passing from this to Chaucer we suddenly feel ourselves to be in another world, we shall find that his superiority is both in the substance of his poetry and in the style of his poetry. His superiority in substance is given by his large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life—so unlike the total want, in the romance poets, of all intelligent command of it. Chaucer has not their helplessness; he has gained the power to survey the world from a central, a truly human point of view. We have only to call to mind the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The right comment upon it is Dryden's: 'It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that *here is God's plenty*!' And again: 'He is a perpetual fountain of good sense.' It is by a large, free, sound representation of things, that poetry, this high

criticism of life, has truth of substance; and Chaucer's poetry has truth of substance.

"Of his style and manner, if we think that of the romance-poetry and then of Chaucer's divine liquidness of diction, his divine fluidity of movement, it is difficult to speak temperately. They are irresistible, and justify all the rapture with which his successors speak of his 'gold dew-drops of his speech'......Chaucer is the father of our splendid English poetry; he is our well of English undefiled, because by the lovely charm of his diction, the lovely charm of his movement, he makes an epoch and founds a tradition. In Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats we can follow the tradition of liquid diction, the fluid movement of Chaucer; at one time it is his liquid diction of which in these poets we feel the virtue, and at another time it is his fluid movement. And the virtue is irresistible."

But Arnold did not regard Chaucer as one of the greatest of world poets on account of his lack of high-seriousness. Referring to this he observed in *The Study of Poetry*: "And yet Chaucer is not one of the great classics. His poetry transcends and effaces, easily and without effort, all the romance poetry of Catholic Christendom; it transcends and effaces all the English poetry contemporary with it, it transcends and effaces all the English poetry subsequent to it down to the age of Elizabeth. Of such avail is poetic truth of substance, in its natural and necessary union with poetic truth of style. And yet, I say, Chaucer is not one of the great classics. He has not their accent. What is wanting in him is suggested by the mere mention of the name of the first classic of Christendom, the immortal poet who died eighty years before Chaucer—Dante. The accent of his verse is altogether beyond Chaucer's reach; we praise him, but we feel that this accent is out of question for him. It may be said that it was necessarily out of the reach of any poet in the England of that stage of growth. Possibly; but we are to adopt a real, not a historic, estimate of poetry. However, we may account for its absence, something is wanting, then, to the poetry of Chaucer, which poetry must have before it can be placed in the glorious class of the best. And there is no doubt what that something is. It is the *high and excellent seriousness*, which Aristotle assigns as one of the grand virtues of poetry. The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity, but it has not the high

seriousness. Homer's criticism of life has it, Dante's has it, Shakespeare's has it."

G. K. Chesterton, a famous twentieth century writer, did not agree with Arnold's charge that Chaucer lacked high seriousness. In his book on Chaucer he pointed out : "I propose in many cases boldly to modernise the Chaucerian language, and especially for the purpose of that is immediate here ; that of showing that Chaucer was great in the sense in which Matthew Arnold connected greatness with what he called 'high seriousness' and the grand style.

"Let anyone knowing only the popular and patronising impression of a merry gossip or warbling court ministrel, suppose that he has presented to him without context or criticism merely such a verse as this :

> Such end hath, lo, this Troilus for love :
> Such end hath all his greate worthiness,
> Such end hath all his royal estate above,
> Such end his lust, such end his nobleness,
> Such end hath all the false world's brittleness.
> And thus began his loving of Creseid
> As I have told ; and in this wise he died.
>
> (*Troilus and Criseyde*)

"Nobody who knows what English is will say that verse is not dignified. Nobody who knows what tragedy is will say that it is unworthy of a tragic poet...Here, however, I have introduced this quotation in a quotable form, in order to emphasise the fact that Chaucer was capable of greatness even in the sense of gravity. We all know that Matthew Arnold denied that the medieval poet possessed this 'high seriousness' ; but Matthew Arnold's version of high seriousness was often only high and dry solemnity. That Chaucer was, in that passage about Troilus, speaking with complete conviction and a sense of the greatness of the subject (which seem to me the only essentials of the real grand style) nobody can doubt who reads the following verses, in which he turns with terrible and realistic scorn on the Pagan gods with whom he had so often played. I have mentioned these matters first to show that Chaucer was capable of high seriousness, even in the sense of those who feel that only serious can be high."

Prof. Livingston Lowes, who also disagrees with Matthew Arnold on this point has observed in his book : *Geoffrey Chaucer* (1934) : "Finally I am not concerned about Chaucer's alleged defect of

'the high and excellent seriousness which Aristotle assigns as the grand virtues of poetry.' The poet who wrote the closing stanzas of the *Troilus*, and the Invocation to the Virgin, in the Prologue of the Second Nun, and the Prioress's Prologue and Tale, and the noble ballad *Truth*, where memory was enriched from the wisdom of Boethius and the Bible ; who was moved by the beauty and hymns and the service of the Church, and who turned at will to the sublimest cantos of the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradise*—that poet was not deficient in seriousness, high or deep. He had, to be sure, no 'message'. But his sanity ('He is,' said Dryden, 'a perpetual fountain of good sense'), his soundness, his freedom from sentimentality, his balance of humorous detachment and directness of vision, and above all his large humanity—those are qualities which 'give us', to apply Arnold's own criterion, 'what we can rest upon'. And we should be hard put to it to name another poet with clear title to rank with those who, in Philip Sidney's words, 'teach by a divine delightfulness'.

The First Poet of England, the Father of English poetry—Chaucer—who has been almost unanimously praised from his own times up to the present day—was not a mere bookman, nor was he in the least a visionary. Lake Shakespeare and Milton, he was, on the contrary, a man of the world and of affairs. He was a man among men, an officer of the court and a minor diplomat, a Comptroller of Customs and Clerk of the King's works, a Justice of Peace and a member of Parliament. He was at home with the aristocracy as well as the middle classes. He was a good Catholic in an age of faith, and he did not bother about the ultimate questions of life and death, which had been settled for him in accordance with the traditional religion. Moreover, he was not publishing books for the general public ; he wrote for himself and for the relatively small group of people who shared his views and tastes.

Chaucer's poetical works fall into three periods. During the first period he imitated French models, particularly the famous and very long poem, *Le Roman de la Rose*, of which he made a translation—*Romaunt of Rose*. This poem which gives us an intimate introduction to the medieval French romances and allegories of courtly love, is the embryo out of which all Chaucer's poetry grows. During the period he also wrote the *Book of the Duchess*, an elegy, which in its form and nature is like the *Romaunt of the Rose ; Complaint unto Pity*, a shorter poem, and *ABC*, a series of stanzas religious in tone, in which each opens with the letter of the alphabet in order.

The poems of the second period (1373-84) show the influence of Italian literature, especially of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Boccaccio's poems. In this period he wrote *The Parliament of Fowls*, which contains very dramatic and satiric dialogues between the assembled birds; *Triolus and Criseyde*, which narrates the story of the Trojan prince and his love for a damsel Criseida; *The Story of Griselda*, in which is given a pitiful picture of womanhood, and *The House of Fame*, which is a masterpiece of comic fantasy, with a graver undertone of contemplation of human folly.

Chaucer's third period (1384-90) may be called the English period, because in it he threw off foreign influences and showed native originality. In the *Legend of Good Women* he employed for the first time the heroic couplet. It was during this period that he wrote *The Canterbury Tales*, his greatest poetic achievement, which places us in the heart of London. Here we find his gentle, kindly humour, which is Chaucer's greatest quality, at its very best.

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories related by the pilgrims on their way to the shrine of Thomas Backet at Canterbury. These pilgrims represent different sections of contemporary English society, and in the description of the most prominent of these people in the *Prologue*, Chaucer's powers are shown at their best. All these characters are individualised, yet their thoroughly typical quality gives unique value to Chaucer's picture of men and manners in the England of his time. The idea of framing a collection of stories was not a new one, but there was never a frame so artful as Chaucer's; it is a moving frame, a cinematograph. A medieval pilgrimage brought people of all ranks together in a combination of piety and holiday-making. Thus his "moving frame" enabled Chaucer to show us a cross-section, almost complete, of English life in the fourteenth century. All classes have representatives here except the highest and the lowest; and Chaucer delights in them all. As a moralist, Chaucer disapproves many of them; but as a poet he accepts them all, according to Keats's famous dictum: "The poet lives in gusto, be it foul or fair...He has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen." But Chaucer insists that every character, good or bad, must be a perfect specimen of his class. The knight is a very perfect knight; the doctor has not his like in the world; the shipman is a smuggler, and worse,

> But of his craft......
> There has noon swich from Hulle to Cartage;

the pardoner is a quack,

> But of his craft, from Berwik into Ware,
> Ne was there swich another pardoner.

The idea of a pilgrimage on which each of some thirty travellers was supposed to relate four stories was brilliant and original, though Chaucer attempted only twenty-four of the stories before his death in or about 1400. The passages which link the tales and describe the interplay between the various pilgrims offer a human comedy of great wit and insight. These stories represent the romantic allegory, satire, the fabliau or popular tale of oral tradition, the fable or animal story, the sermon or morality, and the literary burlesque. By suiting each tale to the character of its narrator Chaucer gave unity to what would otherwise have seemed an oddly assorted anthology of different styles. Thus the knight is appropriately given the chivalric tale of Palamon and Arcite, and the Nun's Priest is given an animal fable containing theological speculation and an obvious moral purpose.

The Canterbury Tales is the greatest poetical work of Chaucer, and in it are represented his main characteristics as a poet—humour, character-portraiture and realism. Referring to these Warton observed in *The History of English Poetry* (1781): "But Chaucer's vein of humour, although conspicuous in the *Canterbury Tales*, is chiefly displayed in the characters with which they are introduced. In these his knowledge of the world availed him in a particular degree, and enabled him to give much accurate pictures of ancient manners as no contemporary nation has transmitted to posterity. It is here that we view the pursuits and employments, the customs and diversions, of our ancestors, copied from the life, and represented with equal truth and spirit, by a judge of mankind, whose penetration qualified him to discern their foibles or discriminating peculiarities; and by an artist, who understood that proper section of circumstances, and those predominant characteristics, which form a finished portrait. We are surprised to find, in so gross and ignorant an age, such talents for satire, and for observation of life; qualities which exert themselves at more civilised periods, when the improved state of society, by subtilising our speculations, and establishing uniform modes of behaviour, disposes mankind to study themselves, and render deviations of conduct, and singularities of character, more immediately and necessarily the objects of censure and ridicule. These curious and valuable remains are specimens of Chaucer's

native genius, unassisted and unalloyed. The figures are all British, and bear no suspicious signatures of classical, Italian, or French imitation."

Earlier than Warton, Dryden had observed in his *Preface to Fables* (1700): "He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humours of the whole English nation in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations, but in their very physiognomies and persons...The matter and manner of their tale, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humours and callings, that each of them would be improper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious characters are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity; their discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling and their breeding; such as are becoming of them, and of them only. Some of his persons are vicious, and some virtuous; some are unlearn'd, or (Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learn'd. Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different: the Reeve, the Miller, and the Cook, are several men, and distinguished from each other as much as the mincing Lady-Prioress, and the broad-speaking, gap-toothed Wife of Bath. But enough of this; there is such a variety of game springing up before me, that I am distracted in my choice, and know not which to follow. 'Its sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that *here is God's plenty*, we have our forefathers and great-grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days: their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England, though they are called by other names than those of Monks, and Friars, and Lady Abbesses, and the Nuns; for mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of Nature, though everything is altered."

William Blake praised the universal traits of these characters, who belong not only to their age, but to all times. In his *Descriptive Catalogues* (1809), he observed: "The characters of Chaucer's Pilgrim are the characters which compose all ages and nations. As one age falls, another rises, different to mortal sight, but to immortals only the same; for we see the characters, repeated again and again, in animals, vegetables, minerals and in men. Nothing new occurs in identical existence. Accident ever varies, substance can never suffer change or decay.

"Of Chaucer's characters, as described in his Canterbury tales, some of the names or titles are altered by time, but the characters themselves for ever remain unaltered; and consequently they are the physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life, beyond which Nature never steps. Names alter, things never alter. I have known multitudes of those who would have been monks in the age of monkery, who in this deistical age are deists. As Newton numbered the stars, and as Linnaeus numbered the plants, so Chaucer numbered the classes of men.

"It is necessary here to speak of Chaucer's own character, that I may set certain mistaken critics right in their conception of the humour and fun that occur on the journey. Chaucer is himself the great poetical observer of men, who in every age is born to record and enternize its acts. This he does as a master, as a father and superior, who looks down on their little follies from the Emperor to the Miller, sometimes with severity, oftener with joke and sport.

"Chaucer's characters live age after age. Every age is a Canterbury Pilgrimage; we all pass on, each sustaining one of these characters of Chaucer. The Doctor of Physics is described as the first of his profession, perfect, learned, completely Master and Doctor in his art. Thus the reader will observe that Chaucer makes everyone of his characters perfect in his kind; everyone is an Antique Statue, the image of a class and not of an imperfect individual.

"The character of women Chaucer has divided into two classes, the Lady Prioress and the Wife of Bath. Are not these leaders of the ages of men? The Lady Prioress in some ages predominates; and in some the Wife of Bath, in whose character Chaucer has been equally minute and exact; because she is also a scourge and a blight."

Referring to the characters of Chaucer, Coleridge observed in *Notes on Lectures* (1818): "As in Shakespeare, Chaucer's characters represent classes but in a different manner; Shakespeare's characters are representatives of the interior nature of humanity in which some element has become so predominant as to destroy the health of the mind; whereas Chaucer's are rather representatives of classes of manners. He is therefore more led to individualise in a mere personal sense."

Referring to the realism of Chaucer's characterisation, Hazlitt pointed out in *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818): "While

Chaucer's intercourse with the busy world, and collision with the actual passions and conflicting interests of others, seemed to brace the sinews of his understanding, and give to his writings the air of a man who describes persons and things that he had known and been intimately concerned in; the same opportunities, operating on a differently constituted frame, only served to alienate Spenser's mind the more from the 'close-pent-up' scenes of ordinary life, and to make him 'revive their concealing continents', to give himself up to the unrestrained indulgence of 'flowery tenderness'.

"It is not possible for any two writers to be more opposite in this respect. Spenser delighted in luxurious enjoyment; Chaucer in severe activity of the mind. As Spenser was the most romantic and visionary, Chaucer was the most practical of all the great poets, the most a man of business of the world. His poetry reads like history. Everything was a downright reality; at least in the relator's mind. A simile, or a sentiment, is as if it were given upon evidence.

"The strokes of his pencil always tell. He dwells only upon the essential, upon that which would be interesting to the persons really concerned; yet as he never omits any material circumstance, he is prolix from the number of points on which he touches, without being diffuse on any one; and is sometimes tedious from the fidelity with which he adheres to his subject, as other writers are from the frequency of their digression from it."

Referring to Chaucer's humour and characterisation Leigh Hunt pointed out in *Wit and Humour* (1846). "Chaucer's humour is of a description the most thoroughly delightful; for it is at once entertaining, profound and good-natured. If this last quality be thought a drawback by some, as wanting the relish of personality, they may supply even that (as some have supplied it), by supposing that he drew his characters from individuals, and that the individuals were uncomfortable accordingly. I confess I see no ground for the supposition beyond what the nature of the case demands. Classes must of course be drawn, more or less, from the individuals composing them; but the unprofessional particulars added by Chaucer to his characters (such as the Merchant's uneasy marriage, and the Franklin's prodigal son) are only such as render the portraits more true, by including them in the general category of mankind. The gangrene which the Cook had on his chin, and which has been considered as a remarkable instance of the gratui-

tous is, on the contrary (besides its masterly intimation of the perils of luxury in general), painfully in character with a man accustomed to breathe an unhealthy atmosphere, and to be encouraging bad humours with tasting sauces and syrups. Besides, the Cook turns out to be a drunkard.

"Chaucer's comic genius is so perfect, that it may be said to include prophetic intimation of all that followed it.........One of its characteristics is a certain tranquil detection of particulars, expressive of generals ; as in the instance just mentioned of the secret infirmity of the Cook. Thus the Prioress speaks French; but it is 'after the school of Stratford at Bow'. Her education was altogether more showy than substantial. The Lawyer was the busiest man in the world, and yet he 'seemed busier than he was'. He made something out of nothing, even in appearance.

"The third great quality of Chaucer's humour is its fair play—the truth and humanity which induces him to see justice done to good and bad, to the circumstances which make men what they are, and the mixture of right and wrong, of wisdom and folly, which they consequently exhibit. His worst characters have some little saving grace of good-nature, or at least joviality and candour. Even the pardoner, however, impudently, acknowledges himself to be a 'vicious man'. His best people, with one exception, betray some infirmity. The good clerk of Oxford, for all his simplicity and singleness of heart, has not escaped the pedentary and pretension of the college. The Good Parson seems without a blemish, even in his wisdom; yet when it comes to his turn to relate a story, he announces it as a 'litttle tale', and tells the longest and most prosing in the book—a whole sermonising volume."

Now let us examine briefly the main characteristics of Chaucer as a poet :—

1. **His Humour :** The chief quality of Chaucer as a poet is his humour. Unlike some of his illustrious predecessors, like Boccaccio, who occasionally practised the art of humour, Chaucer's humour is no longer a momentary gleam, a lucky accident, which relieves the otherwise serious and gloomy atmosphere. For the first time in the history of European literature, it is the soul and essence of an artist and his art. It was not worked up by him consciously, but formed a conscious part of his personality. It was based on his delightful interest in all specimens of humanity, and his tolerance for their absurdities and

failings. It is the genuine humour of a man who till the end of his life retained the freshness of youth in spite of many disillusions, who was filled with the sense of joy and gladness at the varied spectacle of life, and who delighted in things for being what they were especially when a little preposterous. Every object he saw in life, whether serious, or comic, could move him to laughter. Nay, he would not spare even himself. Look at his own sketch in the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* where the Host addressing 'the silent member of Company' says :

> 'Thou lokest as thou woldest finde an hare,
> For ever upon the ground I see thee stare,
> Approache near, loke up merily......
> He seemth elvish by his contenance,
> For unto no wight dooth he daliance.'

And speaking about himself, he says :

> 'My wit is short, ye may well understand.'

Chaucer's humour has a very wide range. In his greatest work, the *Canterbury Tales*, his humour ranges from the finest delicate shades of good natured shyness to downright jokes and redicule which raise an irresistible laughter. There is a broad current of fun in the free, coarse adventures related by the Miller's, the Reve's, the Shipman's, the Somnour's tales. On the other hand, sometimes his humour is so sly, that we cannot be sure whether the poet is joking or not. This undertone of humour is betrayed in the description of the Knight. In fact, Chaucer's humour is so pervasive that we perceive the humorous intent even in the portraits of such perfect characters as the Parson and the Ploughman.

Chaucer's humour is of the finest type. Like Shakespeare's humour, it betrays a freshness of outlook, and is marked by tolerance, charity, forgiveness, and sympathy for its victim. Instead of being clownish or satirical, it is always tinged with a sense of pity for the foibles of mankind. The *Canterbury Tales* are, for the most part, a succession of scenes, which exhibit the weaknesses of human nature, but Chaucer never lashes them as vices. The laughter which he provokes is not the laughter of disdain or malice, but the subtle, silent laughter which is born out of recognition of human frailties, and the curious deviations which they cause in human life. Even in the portrait of the 'Wyf of Bath', which reveals certain defects in the woman, there is never a trace of anger, never a moment when the voice becomes hard or harsh. On the contrary, it is clear that, in

spite of all her faults, he sympathises with the wyf in her most dominant characteristic, the zest of life :

But lord Christ when that it remembreth me
Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,
It tikelth me aboute myn herte rote,
Unto this day it dooth my hearte bote
That I have had my world as in my tyme.

And above all, Chaucer's humour, which is the highest distinction of the *Canterbury Tales* is the flower of his self-realisation as a national poet of England. It developed with the maturity of his original powers; neither the French nor the Italian phase in his career had much to do with that development. His humour reached its full vigour in the last and supreme work where a purely English subject gave his art ample scope for expression of English life and thought. On account of his frankness with a touch of cynicism, his realism and supple shrewdness, his wonderful sense of life, his humanity and his genial tone of feeling, are some of the main characteristics of his humour. Chaucer is a humorist in line with his English successors, like Shakespeare and Dickens. Just as Chaucer's personality, when all is considered remains pre-eminently English, the ring of his humour is English in its predominantly sympathetic tone.

2. **Chaucer's Characterisation :** Chaucer is the first great painter of character in English literature. In fact, next to Shakespeare, he is the greatest in this field. In the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales,* the thirty pilgrims whose portraits Chaucer has traced with the sureness of his touch, give an excellent idea of the state of society at that time. Except for royalty and aristocracy, on the one hand, and the robbers, tramps and outcasts, on the other, two extremes which seldom meet in one company, he has painted in brief practically the whole English nation.

The thirty pilgrims, including the Host, belong to the most diverse professions. A high kind of gentle blood is seen in the knight and his son, who represent the warlike element in society. The learned and liberal professions are represented by the Man of Law, the Doctor, the Oxford Clerk and the poet himself. The Merchant, and the Shipman stand for the higher commercial community; while the Wife of Bath, an expert clothmaker, Harbedessher, and his associates represent the slightly smaller fry of London traders and manufacturers, Agriculture is represented by the Ploughman, the Miller and the

Franklin. The upper servants like the Manciple, and the Reve, and the lower servants like Yoeman and the Cook, represent the Town and Country between them. The Monk from his monastery, the Prioress from her convent, her attendant priests, the village Parson, and the roaming Friar, the Pardoner and the Somnour sufficiently cover the usual categories of the religious order in those days.

In order to preserve the distinctions among these typical characters of the English society of his times, Chaucer has taken pains to point out the difference in their clothes, manners of speech, habits and tendencies, representing the general traits, and the average characteristic of each profession. These personages, therefore, are not the mere phantasms of the brain, or even mere actual possibilities, but real human beings, true to the likeness of the whole classes of men and women. Some of these characters *e.g.*, the Host, the Reve, the Man of Law, the Franklin, were drawn from real living models, who could be recognised by the contemporary listeners.

But whereas these characters represent various types of contemporary society, and some of them are drawn from actual life, as they were intimately known to Chaucer through years crowded with experience and observation, he has transferred them by the magic of his art into real living characters. They are no longer mere mummies or types, but on account of their various idiosyncrasies, their arguments, their agreements, and their likes and dislikes of one another, we recognise them at once as living people like ourselves. These portraits strike a delicate balance between *character* in the technical sense of the word, and the *individual*, a balance which preserves at once the typical qualities of the one and the human idiosyncrasies of the other.

Chaucer takes delight in depicting normal human beings. That is why, some of them are so modern that they seem to be living in our own day. The old knight is an example of the chivalric character which is found in every generation. The squire, half dandy, half athlete, is just the typical young man of any day. The Merchant has all the pompousness which comes from the accumulation of riches, while the Man of Law like lawyers of all times, is ever piling up fees and buying land. We recognise in him the typical lawyer of our own day :—

> Nowhere so bisy a man as he there was,
> And yet he seemed busier than he was.

The doctor's medicines may be out of date, but he uses them in the way we know :—

> Ful ready hadde he his apothecaries,
> To sende him drogges, and his letuaries,
> For each of hem made other for to winue,
> His friendshipe nas not newe to beginne.

He is a man of science from the first :—

> 'His studie was but litel on the Bible'.

There are other characters whom at first we do not recognise : the Prioress, the Monk, the Frankline, the Reve, the Somnour, the Pardoner, the Wife of Bath. But none of them is really extinct. They have changed their names and occupations, but they are here still, for the principal part of each of them is a definite element of humanity. That is why, when we accompany the Pilgrims on their way, we feel quite at home in their company, and have no feeling of being among aliens.

Chaucer's method of portraying characters in a scientific manner, by differentiating them by means of their easiest and most obvious distinctions, was an unprecedented innovation. It was for the first time in European literature that a writer proved himself clearly conscious of the relation between individuals and ideas. Moreover, Chaucer's characters are consistent, and instead of being static, they grow and develop in the course of the tales, like real living human beings. They give their opinions on the stories, that have been told, and these comments reveal their dominant thoughts, their feelings and the objects of their interest. The gentle knight soothes the angry ones with grave and courteous words. Some pilgrims, whose natures or occupations place them at enmity, exchange hot words and nearly come to blows. The sturdy Miller and the slender Reve rail at each other ; the Friar quarrels with the Somnour ; the Miller and the Cook get drunk. The Pardoner and the Wife of Bath deliver long discourses before beginning their stories. In this way the characters who were at first described by the poet in the Prologue reveal themselves yet again by their words and actions. The best example of this revelation of character through a person's words and actions is to be found in Master Harry Bailly, the proprietor of the inn, referred to as 'our hoste'. His character which was at first barely outlined in the *Prologue*, is gradually revealed to us in the pilgrimage in a series of traits, which are different, of course, but which continue to build up the portrait.

3. **Chaucer's Narrative Art:** Chaucer's genius is essentially narrative. He is the finest teller of stories who ever wrote in verse, possessing all the qualities of the true story teller. In the Middle Ages, the poet was considered to be essentially the story-teller, the trouvere, and his stories were expected to possess certain qualities. In the first place, every tale was regarded as a historic example of truth. Secondly, since the object of the trouvere was mainly to gratify the taste of the reader, he was required to provide the latter with large collections of tales full of actions and variety. In the third place, the reputation of the trouvere for poetical skill depended on the beauty and propriety of the form in which he contrived to give unity to his collections of miscellaneous material. Looking at him in these various roles, Chaucer's right to be the first, as he is certainly the greatest of the English trouveres, is incontestable.

The design of the *Canterbury Tales* is excellent. Nine-and-twenty persons, of whom Chaucer is one, are supposed to have met at Tabard Inn in Southwark, on the eve of the pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. The host of the inn offers to show them the way, and proposes that, to enliven the road, each of them shall tell two tales on the journey to Canterbury, and two more on return to London. His suggestion being approved, the company, which is made up of all ranks and orders of English society, set out on the following morning. The action of the poem consists of the incidents of the pilgrimage and of the tales related by the travellers, which are linked to each other by prefaces describing the circumstances under which each narrator performed his task.

This programme, however, is not strictly followed. Though the host is appointed to act with all the absolute power of a master of the ceremonies, he is not always able to control the course of events. Though he has settled that precedence shall be determined by lot and when to the great satisfaction of the cavalcade, the lot has fallen on the Knight, the latter has hardly finished his tale, when order and decency are rudely disturbed by the intervention of the drunken Miller. The character of the story itself, by the feeling it arouses, sometimes gives rise to a sequence of fresh tales, as when the Wife of Bath's views of marriage provoke a quarrel between the Friar and the Somnour. At other times an unexpected incident like the arrival of the Canon's Yeoman, furnishes a motive for the story. Moreover, the audience themselves are not slow to interrupt a story-

teller who becomes tedious and offensive. Thus, as in life, the vicissitudes of the pilgrimage largely determine the character of the stories, and the action of the poem is varied by the passions of the company.

→ There are many instances in the *Canterbury Tales*, which exhibit the dramatic power of Chaucer, and from them it may be surmised that if he had lived in a later day, he would have sprung out as a great dramatist. The vividness of his imagination, which conjures up, so to speak, the very personality of his characters before him, and the contagious force of his pathos, which is as true and spontaneous as his humour, completes in him the born dramatist. Some of the Canterbury stories—those of the Wife of Bath, the Friar, or the Pardoner, for example, can easily be made into lively little plays. The speeches may often be recast in dramatic form with little alteration, the narrative explanations appearing as stage directions or as indications of speakers. But Chaucer's genius was essentially narrative and not dramatic. The true dramatist has a special relation to his personages ; he has not merely observed them, begotten them, endowed them with the very blood and breath by which he himself lives. However widely they may differ from him in character, part of him is reproduced in each of them ; and it is in these reproductions alone that he is visible to his audience. Between Chaucer and the persons in his stories this relation does not exist ; they do not always share his life, and he is never content to be lost and found in them. He is often simply a reporter and always personally present with the audience, takes the readers into confidence with a delightful intimacy which is necessarily excluded by the impersonality of theatrical form.

Chaucer holds the reader's attention in dealing with his favourite themes with vivacity and joyousness and without the least flagging of interest. He keeps up the reader's interest mainly by the irrepressible quality of his humour. His fine economy of art is visible in the familiar straight forward openings of his tales, where without preamble or wasted word, the story begins. Another mark of Chaucer's narrative power is his genius of wise digression. He can add a sudden philosophic depth to any story he likes. For example in the Knight's Tale, he is moved by the story to comment on that human blindness that begs its own destruction unwittingly.

→ The last, though not least, quality of Chaucer's narrative art is that each tale is told in a manner appropriate to the narrator.

The story of the Wife of Bath is a notable example of this quality. As she turns from her autobiography to her tale, the style changes from that of racy argument and reminiscence of the most colloquial kind, to a steady, decorative and highly pointed manner, and every climax is carefully concealed and withheld until the right moment for discovery. There are digressions and delayings, masterly touches that set the tone, stay the denouement, heighten expectation and sharpen the point. In the same manners, all the tales may be truly said to be in keeping with the characters and manners of their tellers.

4. **Chaucer's Service to the English Language :** Chaucer was the real "father" of English poetry, because he not only was the first great poet of England, but also the founder of the modern literary language of England. He did not, of course, *create* English. What he did, besides writing poetry, was, as Lowel truly and excellently says, was that he "found his native tongue a dialect and left it a language". His greatest ambition was to write pretty or humorous verse, and on account of that he spent the greater part of his life in making pliable and mellow the rough English tongue. He very conscientiously and deliberately tried to learn the technique of his art, and hammer the English language in all kinds of metres. It is only when we read the awkward poetry produced in England before him, or even the poetry of his own time, that we can truly realise the greatness of the task accomplished by Chaucer.

In England in 1360, there was no common literary language. Among the many dialects which were spoken in the various parts of England no one had yet taken the lead for literary purposes. Though English was becoming more and more popular among all classes, and it was finding its way into the schools, the law courts, and the parliament, poets still did not have a proper medium to express themselves. John Gorver, the contemporary and friend of Chaucer, was compelled to write the first of his three great poems in French, the second in Latin, and the third in English. The greatest drawback was that the various dialects differed so much in vocabulary and syntax that a man expressing himself in one dialect could hardly render himself intelligible to those who did not speak his own dialect. Moreover, each dialect had its own favourite metrical devices which could hardly be appreciated by those speaking other dialects.

Chaucer was born in London, and he spent most of his time

there. So by birth and surroundings he was confined to the language spoken in the neighbourhood of London, the Midland dialect, which was then also the language of the court, the "King's English", and which was to become, mainly through his efforts, the sole literary language of the whole of England—the English of literature. When Chaucer took it up, it was poor and barren. No real poetry had so far appeared in the dialect. Moreover, it still held a humble place subordinate to Latin and French, and it was held in scorn by kings, nobles, and clerks alike. Chaucer's aim was to breathe into this dialect a higher poetical life, and in this aim he was definite and unswerving.

Chaucer deliberately chose the Midland dialect, because he found that it was really living, and because it had spread up to the upper classes of people. He wrote this dialect with an ease, a polish, and a regularity which commanded immediate and unanimous admiration, and used it as the vehicle of first-rate poetry. Chaucer had come at the psychological moment. He found that most of the nobles read the French poets, and that English which was then coming into use at court was full of French forms and words. He, therefore, found it much easier to adapt the French verse-forms to English use. He endowed the London dialect with all the grace and refinement, which instinct and knowledge enabled him to detect in French poetry. He infused into native vocabulary the courtliness of France, and expressed in English all the graces and delicate shades of meaning which he found in French poetry. Chaucer thus became the founder of modern English, and he gave to the poets of succeeding generations a ready and well-formed medium to express themselves. Nothing more was needed. Those who came after him had now an accepted standard. In this way Chaucer did for the English language what Dante had done for the Italian language.

Chaucer paid particular attention to versification. For his metrical models also he looked exclusively to France. Of his numerous innovations two were destined to prevail, the seven line stanza (*ababbcc*), to which his name was given (Chaucerian stanza) and the heroic couplet. Chaucer practised the rhymed couplet of ten syllabled lines, and saw at once, its use and its limitation. He imported from France and perfected under Italian influence this decasyllabic verse, which was to become the heroic verse, the chosen metre of the great poetry of England.

Chaucer's verse, in the *Canterbury Tales*, is flawlessly metrical. It weaves itself through and around the light-hearted, gaily colloquial, irresponsible chatter, without an instant's check to its sparkling flow. In fact, in the whole range of English narrative verse, there is none so flexible, musical, and, at the same time so superbly forthright and direct as Chaucer's verse.

CHAPTER II

SPENSER AND THE RENAISSANCE

The *Renaissance Period* in English literature is also called the *Elizabethan Period*. The Middle Ages in Europe were followed by the Renaissance. Renaissance means the Revival of Learning, and it denotes in its broadest sense the gradual enlightenment of the human mind after the darkness of the Middle Ages. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453 A.D. by the invasion of the Turks, the Greek scholars who were residing there, spread all over Europe, and brought with them invaluable Greek manuscripts. The essence of this movement was that "man discovered himself and the universe", and that "man, so long blinded, had suddenly opened his eyes and seen". The flood of Greek literature which the new art of printing carried swiftly to every school of Europe revealed a new world of poetry and philosophy. Along with the Revival of Learning, new discoveries took place in several other fields. Vascoda Gama circumnavigated the earth; Columbus discovered America; Copernicus discovered the Solar System and prepared the way for Galileo. Books were printed; and philosophy, science and art were systematised. The Middle Ages were past, and the old world had become new. Scholars flocked to the universities, as adventurers to the new world of America, and there the old authority received a death blow. Truth only was authority to search for truth everywhere, as men sought for new lands and gold and the Fountain of Youth that was the new spirit, which awoke in Europe with the Revival of Learning.

The chief characteristic of the Renaissance was its emphasis on Humanism, which means man's concern with himself as an object of contemplations. This movement was started in Italy by Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio in the fourteenth century, and from there it spread to other countries of Europe. In England it became popular during the Elizabethan period. The poets directed their gaze inward, and became deeply interested in the problems of human personality. It was this new interest in human personality, the passion for life, which was responsible for the exquisite lyrical poetry of the Elizabethan Age, dealing with the problems of death, decay, transitoriness of life etc.

Another aspect of Humanism was the enhanced sensitiveness to formal beauty, and the cultivation of the aesthetic sense. It showed itself in a new ideal of social conduct, that of the courtier. Lyly wrote his romance of *Euphues* not merely as an exercise in a new kind of prose but with the serious purpose of inculcating righteousness of living, based on self-control. Sidney wrote his *Arcadia* in the form of fiction in order to expound an ideal of moral excellence. Spenser wrote his *Faerie Queene*, with a view "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle disposition".

Poetry in the Renaissance period took a new trend. It was the poetry of the new age of discovery, enthusiasm and excitement. Under the impact of the Renaissance, the people of England were infused with freshness and vigour, and these qualities are clearly reflected in the poetry of that age.

The poetry of the Elizabethan Age opens with the publications of a volume known as *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557). The book which contained the verse of **Sir Thomas Wyatt** (1503 ?—1542), and the **Earl of Survey** (1517?—1547) marks the first English poetry of the Renaissance. Wyatt and Surrey wrote a number of songs, especially sonnets which adhered to the Petrarchan model, and which later was adopted by Shakespeare. They also attempted the blank verse which was improved upon by Marlowe and then perfected by Shakespeare. They also experimented a great variety of metres which influenced Spenser. Thus Wyatt and Surrey stand in the same relation to the glory of Elizabethan poetry dominated by Spenser and Shakespeare, as Thomson and Collins do to Romantic poetry dominated by Wordsworth and Shelley.

Another original writer belonging to the early Elizabethan group of poets who were mostly courtiers, was **Thomas Sackville** (1536—1608). In his *Mirror for Magistrates* he has given a powerful picture of the underworld where the poet describes his meetings with some famous Englishmen who had been the victims of misfortunes. Sackville, unlike Wyatt and Surrey, is not a cheerful writer, but he is superior to them in poetic technique.

The greatest of these early Elizabethan poets was *Sir Philip Sidney* (1554—1586). He was a many-sided person and a versatile genius—soldier, courtier and poet—and he distinguised himself in all these capacities. Like Dr. Johnson and Byron he stood in symbolic

relation to his times. He may be called the ideal Elizabethan, representing in himself the great qualities of that great age in English history and literature. Queen Elizabeth called him one of the jewels of her crown, and at the age of twenty-three he was considered one of the ripest statesmen of the age.

As a literary figure, Sidney made his mark in prose as well as in poetry. His prose works are *Arcadia* and the *Apologie for Poetrie.* His greatest work, of course, is in poetry— the sequence of sonnets entitled *Astrophel and Stella,* in which Sidney celebrated the history of his love for Penelope Deuereux, sister of the Earl of Essex—a love which came to a sad end through the intervention of Queen Elizabeth with whom Sidney had quarrelled. As an example of lyrical poetry expressing directly in the most sincere manner an intimate and personal experience of love in its deepest passion, this sonnet sequence marks an epoch. Their greatest merit is their sincerity. The sequence of the poet's feelings is analysed with such vividness and minuteness that we are convinced of their truth and sincerity. Here we find the fruit of experience, dearly bought :

> Desire ; desire ; I have too dearly bought
> With price of mangled mind. Thy worthless ware.
> Too long, too long, asleep thou hast me brought,
> Who should my mind to higher prepare.

Besides these personal and sincere touches, sometimes the poet gives a loose reign to his imagination, and gives us fantastic imagery which was characteristic of Elizabethan poetry.

SPENSER

(1552—1599)

The greatest name in Elizabethan poetry is that of Spenser, who may be called the poet of chivalry and Medieval glory. The Elizabethan Age was the age of transition, when the time-honoured institutions of chivalry, closely allied to Catholic ritual, were being attacked by the zeal of the protestant reformer and the enthusiasm for the writings of European humanists. As Spenser was in sympathy with both the old and the new, he tried to reconcile these divergent elements in his greatest work—*The Faerie Queene*. Written in the form of an allegory, though on the surface it appears to be dealing with the petty intrigues, corrupt dealings, and clever manipulations of politicians in the court of Elizabeth, yet when seen from a higher

point of view, it brings before us the glory of the medieval times clothed in an atmosphere of romance. We forget the harsh realities of life, and are lifted into a fairy land where we see the knights performing chivalric deeds for the sake of the honour of Queen Gloriana. We meet with shepherds, sylvan nymphs, and satyrs, and breathe the air of romance, phantasy and chivalry.

Though Spenser's fame rests mainly on *The Faerie Queene*, he also wrote some other poems of great merit. His *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) is a pastoral poem written in an artificial classical style which had become popular in Europe on account of the revival of learning. Consisting of twelve parts, each devoted to the month of the year, here the poet gives expression to his unfruitful love for a certain unknown Rosalind, through the mouth of shepherds talking and singing. It also deals with various moral questions and the contemporary religious issues. The same type of conventional pastoral imagery was used by Spenser in *Astrophel* (1586), an elegy which he wrote on the death of Sidney to whom he had dedicated the *Calendar*. *Four Hymns* which are characterised by melodious verse were written by Spenser in honour of love and beauty. His *Amorette*, consisting of eighty-eight sonnets, written in the Petrarchan manner which had become very popular in those days under the influence of Italian literature, describes beautifully the progress of his love for Elizabeth Boyle whom he married in 1594. His *Epithalamion* is the most beautiful marriage hymn in the English language.

The greatness of Spenser as a poet rests on his artistic excellence. Though his poetry is surcharged with noble ideas and lofty ideals, he occupies an honoured place in the front rank of English poets as the poet of beauty, music and harmony, through which he brought about a reconciliation between the medieval and the modern world. There is no harsh note in all his poetry. He composed his poems in the spirit of a great painter, a great musician. Above all, he was the poet of imagination, who, by means of art, gave an enduring life to the offsprings of his imagination. As a metrist his greatest contribution to English poetry is the Spenserian stanza which is admirably suited to descriptive or reflective poetry. It is used by Thomson in *The Castle of Indolence*, by Keats in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, by Shelley in *The Revolt of Islam* and by Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. On account of all these factors, Spenser has been a potent influence on the English poets of all ages, and there is no exaggeration in the remark made by Charles Lamb that "Spenser is the poets' poet".

Spenser has been highly praised by critics from his days up to the modern times. Especially his greatest poetical work, *The Faerie Queene*, has raised much controversy. Referring to it Dryden wrote in *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693): "The English have only to boast of Spenser and Milton, who neither of them wanted either genius or learning to have been perfect poets, and yet both of them are liable to many censures. For there is no uniformity in the design of Spenser ; he aims at the accomplishment of no one action ; he raises up a hero for every one of his adventures ; and endows each of them with some particular moral virtue ; which renders them all equal, without subordination, or preference. Every one is most valiant in his own legend ; only we must do him that justice to observe, that magnanimity, which is the character of Prince Arthur, shines throughout the whole poem, and succours the rest, when they are in distress. The original of every knight was then living in the court of Queen Elizabeth ; and he attributed to each of them that virtue, which he thought was most conspicuous in them ; an ingenuous piece of flattery, though it turned not much to his account. Had he lived to finish his poem, in the six remaining legends ; it had certainly been more of a piece ; but could not have been perfect, because the model was not true. But Prince Arthur, or his chief patron, Sir Philip Sidney, whom he intended to make happy by the marriage of Gloriana, dying before him, deprived the poet both of means and spirit to accomplish his rest. For the rest, his obsolete language, and the ill choice of his stanza, are faults but of the second magnitude ; for, notwithstanding the first, he is still intelligible, at least after a little practice ; and for the last, he is the more to be admired, that, labouring under such a difficulty, his verses are so numerous, so various, and so harmonious, that only Virgil, whom he profestly imitated has surpassed him among the Romans."

Though pointing out certain defects in *The Faerie Queene*, Hughes an eighteenth century critic, praising the imaginative quality of the poem, and its fine versification, wrote in 1715 : "The chief merit of this poem (the Faerie Queen) consists in that surprising vein of fabulous invention, which runs through it, and enriches it everywhere with Imagery and Description more than we meet with in any other modern poet. The author seems to be possessed of a kind of Poetical Magic ; and the figures he calls up to our view rise so thick upon us, that we are at once pleased and distracted by the exhaustless variety of them ; so that the faults may in a manner be imputed to his

excellence; his abundance betrays him into excess, and his judgment is overborne by the torrent of his imagination.

"That which seems most liable to exception in this work is the model of it, and the choice the author has made of so romantic a story. The several books appear rather like so many several poems, than one entire Fable. Each of them has its peculiar knight and is independent of the rest; and though some of the persons make their appearance in different books yet this has very little effect in connecting them. Prince *Arthur* is indeed the principal person, and has therefore a share given him in every legend; but his part is not considerable enough in any one of them. He appears and vanishes like a Spirit; and we lose sight of him too soon to consider him as the Hero of the Poem.

"These are the most obvious defects in the fable of the *Fairy Queen*. The want of unity in the story makes it different for the Reader to carry it in his mind, and distracts too much his attention to the several parts of it; and indeed the whole frame of it would appear monstrous, if it were to be examined by the rules of Epic Poetry, as they have been drawn from the practice of *Homer* and *Virgil*. But it is plain the author never designed it by these rules, I think it ought rather to be considered as a poem of a particular kind, describing in a series of allegorical adventures or episodes the most noted virtues and vices; to compare it therefore with the models of antiquity, would be like drawing a parallel between the Roman and the Gothick Architecture. In the first there is doubtless a more natural grandeur and simplicity; in the latter we find mixtures of beauty and barbarism, yet assisted by the invention of a variety of inferior ornaments; and though the former is more majestic in the whole, the latter may be very surprising and agreeable in parts.

"I have not yet said anything concerning Spenser's versification, in which, though he is not always equal to himself, it may be affirmed that he is superior to all his contemporaries, and even to those that followed him for some time.

"As to the stanza in which *The Faerie Queene* is written, though the author cannot be commanded by his choice of it, yet it is much more hormonious in its kind than the heroic verse of that age; it is almost the same with what the Italians call their Ottave Rima, which is used both by Ariosto and Tasso, but improved by Spenser, wtih the addition of a line more in the close, of the length of our

Alexandrines. The defect of it in long or narrative poems is apparent; the same measure, closed always by full stop, in the same place, by which every stanza is made as it were a distinct paragraph, grows tiresome by continual repetition, and frequently breaks the sense, when it ought to be carried on without interruption. With this exception the reader will, however, find it harmonious, full of well-sounding epithets, and of such elegant turns of the thought and words, that Dryden himself owns he learned these graces of style chiefly from our author."

Pope who was fascinated by the pictorial quality of *The Faerie Queene*, which was a perennial source of delight wrote in *Spenser's Anecdotes* (1744): "After my reading a canto of Spenser two or three days ago to an old lady between 70 and 80, she said that I had been showing her a collection of pictures. She said very right; and I know not how it is, but there is something in Spenser that pleases one as strongly in one's old age as it did in one's youth. I read the *Faery Queene* when I was about 12, with a vast deal of delight; and I think it gave me as such when I read it over about a year or two ago."

Upton praising the simplicity and unity of the *Faerie Queene* wrote in his Preface to the poem (1758): "In every poem there ought to be simplicity and unity; and in the epic poem the unity of the action should never be violated by introducing any ill-joined or heterogeneous parts. This essential rule seems to me strictly to have followed; for what story can well be shorter, or more simple, than the subject of this poem? A British Prince sees in a vision the Fairy Queen; he falls in love, and goes in search after this unknown fair; and at length finds her. This fable has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning is, the British Prince saw in a vision the Fairy Queen, and fell in love with her: the middle, his search after her, with the adventures that he underwent; the end his finding whom he sought."

Hurd referring to the Gothic structure of the *Faerie Queene* wrote in *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762): "When an architect examines a Gothic structure by Grecian rules, he finds nothing but deformity. But the Gothic architecture has its own rules, by which when it comes to be examined, it is seen to have its merit, as well as the Grecian. The question is not, which of the two is conducted in the simplest or truest taste: but, where there be not sense and design in both, when scrutinised by the laws on which it is projected.

"The same observation holds of the two sorts of poetry. Judge of the Faery Queen by the classic models, and you are shocked with its disorder : Consider it with an eye to its Gothic original, and you find it regular. The unity and simplicity of the former are more complete, but the latter has that sort of unity and simplicity, which results from its nature.

"The Faery Queen then, as a Gothic poem, derives its *Method*, as well as other characters of its composition, from the established modes and ideas of chivalry.

"It was usual, in the days of knight-errantry, at the holding of any great feast, for knights to appear before the Prince; who presided it, and claim the privilege of being sent on any adventure, to which the solemnity might give occasion. For it was supposed that, when such a *throng of knights and barons bold*, as Milton speaks of, were got together, the distressed would flock in from all quarters, as to a place where they knew they might find and claim redress for all their grievances.

"That feast was held for twelve days : and each day was distinguished by the claim and allowance of some adventure.

"Now laying down this practice, as a foundation for the poet's design, you will see how properly the Faery Queen is conducted......

"If you ask then, what is this *Unity* of Spenser's poem ? I say, it consists in the relation of its several adventures to one common *original*, the appointment of the Faery Queen ; and to one common *end*, the completion of the Faery Queen's injunctions......

"This, it is true, is not the classic Unity, which consists in the representation of one entire action : but it is an Unity of another sort, an unity resulting from the respect which a number of related actions have to one common purpose. In other words, it is an unity of *design*, and not of action......

"Thus far he drew from Gothic ideas, and these ideas, I think, would lead him no farther. But, as Spenser knew what belonged to classic composition, he was tempted to tie his subject still closer together by *one* expedient of his own, and by *another* taken from his classic models.

"His *own* was two interrupt the proper story of each book, by dispersing it into several ; involving by this means, and as it were intertwisting the several actions together, in order to give some-

thing like the appearance of one action to his twelve adventures. And for this conduct, absurd as it seems, he had some great examples in the Italian poets, though I believe, they were led into it by different motive.

"The other expedient, which he borrowed from the classics, was by one superior character, which should be seen throughout. Prince Arthur, who had a separate adventure of his own, was to have his part in each of the others ; and thus several actions were to be embodied by the interest which one Principal Hero had in them all. It is even observable, that Spenser gives this adventure of Prince Arthur, in quest of Gloriana, as the proper subject of his poem. The truth was, the violence of classic prejudices forced the poet to affect the appearance of unity, though in contradiction to his Gothic system. And, as far as we can judge of the whole work from the finished half of it, the adventure of Prince Arthur, whatever the author pretended, was but an afterthought ; and at least with regard to the *historical fable*, which we are now considering, was only one of the expedients by which he would conceal the disorder of his Gothic plan.

"And if this was his design, I will venture to say that both his expedients were injudicious. Their purpose was to ally two things in nature incomparable, the Gothic, and the classic unity ; the effect of which misalliance was to discover and expose the nakedness of the Gothic.

"But how faulty so ever this conduct be in the literal story, it is perfectly right in the *moral*: and that for an obvious reason, though his critics seem not to have been aware of it. His chief hero was not to have the twelve virtues in the *degree* in which the knights had, each of them, their own (such a character would be a monster) but he was to have so much of each as was requisite to form his superior character. Each virtue, in its perfection, is exemplified in its own knight : they are all, in a due degree, concentrated in Prince Arthur.

"This was the poet's *moral* : And what way of expressing this moral in the *history*, but making Prince Arthur appear in each adventure, and in a manner subordinate to its proper hero ? Thus, though inferior to each in his own specific virtue, he is superior to all by uniting the whole circle of their virtues in himself. And thus he arrives, at length, at the possession of that bright form of *Glory*

whose ravishing beauty, as seen in a dream or vision, had led him out into these miraculous adventures in the land of Faery.

"The conclusion is, that, as an *allegorical* poem, the method of the *Faery Queen* is governed by the justness of the *moral*. As a *narrative* poem, it is conducted on the ideas and usages of *chivalry*. In either view, if taken by itself, the plan is defensible. But from the union of the two designs there arises a perplexity and confusion, which is the proper, and only considerable, defect of this extraordinary poem."

Campbell who was greatly impressed by the richness of imagery and the sweetness of verse of Spenser's *Faery Queen* wrote in *Essay on English Poetry* (1819) : "Spenser's command in imagery is wide, easy and luxuriant. He threw the soul of harmony into our verse, and made it more warmly, tenderly, and magnificently descriptive, than it ever was before, or, with a few exceptions, than it has ever been since. It must certainly be owned that in description he exhibits nothing of the brief strokes and robust power, which characterise the very greatest poets ; but we shall nowhere find more airy and expansive images of visionary things, a sweeter tone of sentiment, or a finer flush in the colour of the language, than in this Rubens of English poetry. His fancy teems exuberantly in minuteness of circumstance, like a fertile soil sending bloom and verdure through the utmost extremities of the foliage which it nourishes. On a comprehensive view of the whole work, we certainly miss the charm of strength, symmetry, and rapid or interesting progress ; for, though the plan which the poet designed is not completed, it is easy to see that no additional cantos could have rendered it less perplexed. But still there is a richness of his materials, even where their coherence is loose, and their disposition confused. The clouds of his allegory may seem to spread into shapeless forms, but they are still the clouds of a glowing atmosphere. Though his story grows desultory, the sweetness and grace of his manner still abide by him.

Hazlitt who was also fascinated by the harmony of Spenser's verse, and the luxuriance of his imagination, observed in his *Lectures on English Poets* : "The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind ; and he is guided in his fantastic delineation by no rule but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination. He luxuriates equally in scenes of Eastern magnificence;

or the still solitude of a hermit's cell—in the extremes of sensuality or refinement.

"But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but that they cannot understand it on account of allegory. They are afraid of the allegory, as if they thought it would bite them, they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and they think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain, the whole is as plain as a pikestaff.

"His versification is, at once, the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, 'in many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out'—that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation—dwelling on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakespeare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite like those of the waves of sea: but the effect is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled."

Giving his estimate of Spenser, Coleridge observed in his *Lectures* (1818): "There is this difference, among many others, between Shakespeare and Spenser: Shakespeare is never coloured by the customs of his age... In Spenser the spirit of chivalry is entirely predominant, although with a much greater infusion of the poet's own individual self into it than is found in any other writer.

"As characteristic of Spenser, I would call your particular attention in the first place to the indescribable sweetness and fluent projection of his verse, very clearly distinguishable from the deeper and more interwoven harmonies of Shakespeare and Milton.

"Combined with this sweetness and fluency, the scientific construction of the metre of the *Faery Queene* is very noticeable. One of Spenser's arts is that of alliteration, and he uses it with great effect in doubling the impression of an image:

In wilderness and wastful deserts,—
Through woods and wastness wide

He is particularly given to an alternate alliteration which is, perhaps, when well used, a great secret in melody :

A ramping lyon rushed suddenly,—
And sad to see her sorrowful constraint,—
And on the grass her daintie limbs did lay

You cannot read a page of the *Faery Queene*, if you read for that purpose, without perceiving the intentional alliterativeness of the words ; and yet so skilfully is this managed, that it never strikes any unwarned ear as artificial or other than the result of the necessary movement of the poem.

(3) "Spenser displays great skill in harmonising his description of external nature and actual incidents with the allegorical character and epic activity of the poem.

"Observe also the exceeding vividness of Spenser's descriptions. They are not, in the true sense of the word, picturesque ; but are composed of wondrous series of images, as in our dreams.

(4) "You will take especial note of the marvellous independence and true imaginative absence of all particular space or time in the *Faery Queene*. It is in the domains neither of history or geography; it is ignorant of all artificial boundary, all material obstacles; it is truly in land of Faery, that is, of mental space. The poet has placed you in a dream, a charmed sleep, and you neither wish, nor have the power, to inquire where you are, or how you got there."

Leigh Hunt, who considered Spenser as the pure poet, observed in his essay, *Imagination and Fancy* (1844) : "Spenser's great characteristic is poetic luxury. If you go to him for a story, you will be disappointed ; if for a style, classical as concise, the point against him is conceded ; if for pathos, you must weep for personages half-real and too beautiful ; if for mirth, you must laugh out of good breeding. But if you love poetry well enough to enjoy it for its own sake, let no evil reports of his 'allegory' deter you from his acquaintance, for great will be our loss. His allegory itself is but one part allegory and nine parts beauty and enjoyment ; sometimes an excess of flesh and blood. His forced rhymes, and his sentences written to fill up, which in a less poet would be intolerable, are accompanied with such endless grace and dreaming pleasure.

"Spenser is the farthest removed from the ordinary cares and haunts of the world of all the poets that ever wrote, except perhaps Ovid ; and this, which is the reason why mere men of business and the world do not like him, constitutes his most bewitching charm with the poetical. He is not so great a poet as Shakespeare or Dante, he has less imagination, though more fancy, than Milton. He does not see things so purely in their elements as Dante ; neither can he combine their elements like Shakespeare, nor bring such frequent intensities of words, or of wholesale imaginative sympathy, to bear upon his subject as any one of them ; though he has given noble diffuser instances of the latter in his Una, and his Mammon, and his accounts of Jealousy and Despair :

"Take him in short for what he is, whether greater or less than his fellows, the poetical faculty is so abundantly and beautifully predominant in him above every other, though he had passion, and thought, and plenty of ethics, and was as learned a man as Ben Jonson, perhaps as Milton himself, but he has always been felt by his countrymen to be what Charles Lamb called him, the 'poets' poet'. He has had more idolatory and imitation from his brethren than all the rest put together."

Russel Lowell referring to Spenser's greatness as a poet wrote in his book *Spenser* (1875) : "Charles Lamb made the most pithy criticism of Spenser when he called him the 'poets' poet'. We can fairly leave the allegory on one side, for perhaps, after all, he adopted it only for the reasons that it was in fashion, and put it on as he did his ruff, not because it was becoming, but because it was the only wear. The true use of him is a gallery of pictures which we visit as the mood takes us, and where we spend an hour or two at a time, long enough to sweeten our perceptions, not so long as to cloy them.

"His natural tendency is to shun whatever is sharp and abrupt. He loves to prolong emotion, and lingers in his honeyed sensations like a bee in the transulent cup of a lily. So entirely are beauty and delight in it the native element of Spenser, that whenever in the *Faery Queene* you come suddenly on the moral, it gives you a shock of unpleasant surprise, a kind of grit, as when one's teeth close on a bit of gravel in a dish of strawberries and cream. He is the most fluent of our poets. Sensation passing through emotion into revery is a prime quality of his manner. And to read him puts one in the condition of revery, a state of mind in which our thoughts and feelings float motionless, as one sees fish do in a gentle stream, with just enough

vibration of their fins to keep themselves from going down with the current, while their bodies yield indolently to all its soothing curves. He chooses his language for its rich canorousness rather than for intensity of meaning. To characterise his style in a single word, I should call it *costly*. None but the daintiest and nicest phrases will serve him, and he allures us from one to the other with such cunning baits of alliteration, and such sweet lapses of verse, that never any word seems more eminent than the rest, nor detains the feeling to eddy around it, but you must go on to the end before you have time to stop and muse over the wealth that has been lavished on you."

At present Spenser is not so popular a poet as before. Giving reasons for this neglect, C. S. Lewis observed in *The Allegory of Love* (1936) : "Misconceptions about the real merit and limitation of Spenser's genius have led to the present neglect. The very phase 'poets' poet' is taken to have an intensive force and the phase is interpreted on the analogy of *Holy of Holies*. Readers trained on such a conception open their Spenser expecting to find some 'quintessential' in the lowest and most obvious sense of that word—something more mellifluous than Shakespeare's sonnets, more airy than Shelley, more swooningly sensuous than Keats, more dreamlike than William Morris, and then, what meets their eye is something prosaic, the reader excusably throws the book away. Now this would not happen if Spenser had not a false reputation for sheer 'poeticalness'. The reader, unless he were a fool, would be prepared for flats in a long poem : he would not be put off by one such experience from making the acquaintance of Wordsworth or Chaucer. The real trouble is that he cannot be prepared for a flat stanza in a poem such as *The Faerie Queene* is commonly supposed to be : he has been taught not to look for vigorous thought or serious issues or even coherence and sanity in his Spenser—taught that the man's only merit is voluptuousness and day dream. And if Spenser can, in any passage, do so badly the only thing he is supposed to be able to do at all, he is naturally rejected. We tolerate bad manners in a learned, or a funny, or a good man ; but how if the man admittedly has no claim on us except his reputed good breeding, and then turns out to be deficient even in that ? In order to avoid such false judgments we must revise the popular opinion of Chaucer. So far from being a poet where excellent and sustained mastery of language is his only merit, he is a poet whose chief fault is the uncertainty of his style. He

can be as prosaic as Wordsworth : he can be clumsy, unmusical, and flat."

Let us now consider briefly the main characteristics of Spenser as a poet.

1. **Spenser—The Poet's Poet.** Spenser has been rightly called by Charles Lamb the "Poets' Poet", because the poetic faculty in him is so abundantly and beautifully predominant above every other poet of England that he has been more honoured and imitated by his brethren than all the other poets put together. The publication of the *Faerie Queene* placed Spenser at once and for his life time at the head of all living poets. The world of his day immediately acknowledged the charm and perfection of the new work of art which had taken it by surprise. The contemporary poets also welcomed it heartily and generously. Poets like Lodge and Drayton paid their tribute to the new master and called him "learned, revered and excellent." Even the fierce pamphleteer, Thomas Nash, addressed him as "heavenly Spenser", and praised "the Faery Singer's stately turned verse." Shakespeare also held Spenser in great respect and considered him as the representative of poetry. In the *Passionate Pilgrim*, he spoke of Spenser in such admiring terms :

> Spenser to me, whose deep conceit is such,
> As passing all conceit, needs no defence.
> Thou lov'st to hear the sweet melodious sound
> That Phoebus' lute, the queen of music, makes ;
> And in deep delight am chiefly drown'd
> When as himself to singing he betakes.

In fact, Spenser was considered the leader of the Elizabethan poets who followed his bier to Westminster Abbey, as Camden tells, "with lamenting elegies and casting into his grave the pens wherewith they had written them." He rightly deserves the title of his epitaph :

> The prince of poets in his Time.

This fame of Spenser has never diminished. In every age the greatest of English poets have considered him as the master and have drawn inspiration from his poetry and personality. Cowley was made a poet by reading him. Milton, whom Dryden calls "the poetical son of Spenser", acknowledged that Spenser was his original. Dryden himself admitted that "Virgil in Latin, and Spenser in English have been my masters." Pope found as much pleasure in the *Faerie*

Queene in his later years as he had found in reading it when he was twelve years old. It is said of Thomas Gray that Spenser was his favourite poet, and he never sat down to compose poetry without reading Spenser for a considerable time previously. Wordsworth also found Spenser full of nobleness, purity, and sweetness :

That gentle Bard,
Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State,
Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven
With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace,
I called him Brother, Englishman, and Friend

Scott admitted that he could have read Spenser for ever. Keats also was greatly influenced by Spenser, and paid his tribute in the following terms :—

A silver trumpet Spenser, blows,
And as its martial notes to silence flee,

From a virgin chorus flows
A hymn in praise of spotless chastity.
'Tis still wild warblings from the Aeolian lyre
Enchantment softly breathe, and tremblingly expire.

If Chaucer is called the "Father of English poetry", Spenser may be called the "Second Father". He was a man of positive mind, who deliberately faced the problem of how good English poetry might be written—English poetry that might vie with the Greek and Latin and French poetry, and be proclaimed with one accord good poetry. The most obvious weakness of English poetry between Chaucer and Spenser was weakness of style. Compared to the wealth of Virgil and the pith of Horace, he found a certain baldness and diffuseness in the style of his elder contemporaries. Chaucer's ease and grace was not to be found in Spenser's contemporaries—Wyatt, Surrey, Sackville. Moreover, their scope was very much limited. The work that Spenser proposed to himself was greater, deeper and more various than all of these put together. There were great matters to be treated and great forms to be created to suit the new conditions. Moreover, since the English language was so much altered in syntax since the time of Chaucer, "the one English master, who could say the things he wanted to say in the way in which he wanted to say them"—he had to make a style for himself, a new style to suit the new aims. It was forced on him, not only to make his verse beautiful, but also intelligible.

Spenser accomplished his great ideal in his greatest work—*Faerie Queene*. Here he took for his subject all that concerns man in all his faculties and desires and relations and expanded all his native power and all his acquired knowledge and skill on the construction of the ideal and its embellishment. Here he fused together feeling, intuition, tradition, learning, the sense of beauty, the sense of right, the sense of divinity, all combined in that ideal as well as the philosophy of the ancients, the teaching of the Church, the custom of English nobility, in fact, the best he found in the Renaissance, the Reformation and the chivalry of the Middle Ages. And above all, he made the moral doctrine the central theme of his great poem, which has always worked on the minds of men, inspiring them to right thinking and right action.

Spenser devoted all his energy to this great task, and transformed into poetry his patriotism, moral feeling, and scholarship. Behind his energy lay the moral qualities without which no artist may succeed—the gift of sheer hard work, patience and endurance, ambition, the determination to excel, and above all, faith and pride. By writing this great poem, Spenser proved that England was capable of breeding and nourshing poets as Greece, France and Italy. In this way, Spenser lifted the level of English poetry by a great and sustained effort of rich and varied art, in which one main purpose rules—loyalty to what is noble and pure. He paved the new way by making English poetry as the vehicle of all the varied and complicated aspects of modern life and also by enriching the English language, making it more musical and a fit medium for that purpose. It was such a great task that no poet of England who came after him—not even Shakespeare—could afford to ignore him; nay, they have acknowledged him as their master.

Spenser's greatest contribution to English poetry was the Spenserian stanza, which has firmly established itself in the English language, as a metre of admirable capacity for any kind of descriptive and reflective poetry. On account of its grace and voluptuous turn of rhythm it is admirably suited to the pictorial as well as musical faculty of a poet. It is employed by Thomson in *The Castle of Indolence*, by Keats in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, by Shelley in *The Revolt of Islam*, and by Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. To have been the poetical ancestor of the poetry of these illustrious writers shows how deeply the art of Spenser is rooted in the imaginative genius of his country.

Spenser also gave a new conception of poetry, which has been adopted by the later poets. The medieval man, living in expectation of the inevitable end, considered this earth as a fleeting bubble, and so could not claim for his own work more than the brief span allotted to earthly things. Chaucer himself said in *Envoy to Scogan.*

> All shal passe that men prose or rhyme ;
> Take every man his turn, as for his time.

But Spenser, sharing the new spirit of the Renaissance believed in his mother tongue, and had trust in poetry. In *The Ruins of Time,* he has proclaimed poetry as the one permanent movement of human greatness :—

> For deeds to die, howeuer noble donne,
> And thoughts of men doe as themselves decay :
> But wise words taught in numbers for to runne,
> Recorded by the Muses, live for aye,
> Ne may with storming showers die washt away.
> No bitter breathing windes with harmful blast,
> Nor age, nor envy, shall them ever wast.

Spenser considered poetry as the gift of God, bestowed in His mysterious grace upon a few favoured mortals. The poet was the chosen agent of God who in turn for his faithful service, was granted a measure of the permanence which is God's alone. That was the ultimate inspiration of his labour, and the source of his energy ; and that was the responsibility which rested upon him. The poet's duty was to enrich the native tongue by writing beautifully, preach sound and true doctrines; prompt right action, and arouse noble desires and thoughts. In other words, his duty was not merely to delight, but to instruct also. By accomplishing in the *Faerie Queene* what was expected of a truly great poet, Spenser gave to England, to his contemporaries and his successors, the example of a magnificent way of writing, art and thought, and by his own strenuous effort in pursuit of his great object, he gave to the succeeding poets of his country, pride, confidence and faith in themselves, in their country, in their language and in their art. On account of the manifold services he rendered to English poetry, which have made him a perennial source of inspiration, it is no exaggeration to say that Spenser was "the poets' poet", and the "Second Father of English poetry", Chaucer being the first.

2. **Spenser's Imagery or Pictorial Quality.** Imagery or pictorial quality is Spenser's speciality as a poet. His poetry is

so full of images of all kinds, that it seems as if it was Spenser's nature to look at the world of reality and fancy as a grand pageant, a splendid spectacle. As one critic has said, "He had but to close his eyes, and the image arose, crowding and over-flowing in his brain, and though he poured them forth in his poetry, they continued floating up more copious and more dense. They were like the vapours which rise incessantly from the sea, ascend and sparkle, while underneath mist arises, and the splendid procession continues and never grows dim".

The medium of allegory, through which he viewed the institution of kinghthood in the *Faerie Queene*, gave a fine scope for the exercise of the imaginative powers peculiar to Spenser. As a poetical painter, using words and rhythms in place of external form and colour, he is perhaps unrivalled. We pass through his scenes, laid in the "delightful land of Faerie", as through an enchanted landscape in which a dream-like succession of pageants, and dissolving views of forests, lakes, castles, caves, and palaces, each suggesting some spiritual meaning, and, at the same time, raising in the fancy concrete image, relieve the tedium of the journey.

Spenser had the pictorial sense strongly developed, and his poetry has a strong affinity with that of the great painters of the continent. The great Renaissance painters would certainly have enjoyed some of the fine pictures that Spenser has painted in the *Faerie Queene*, like the Red Cross Knight's battle with the Dragon, the Dragon lying dead with the city and towers in the background, and the watchman on the wall, and the Red Cross Knight himself, whose

> glittering armor made
> A little glooming light, much like a shade.

Hazlitt impressed by the superb poetical quality of Spenser remarked, "No body but Rubens could have painted the fancy of Spenser, though he could not have given the sentiment, the airy dream that hovers over it."

There is a great variety in Spenser's imagery. His images of natural objects are highly realistic. For example, in the 23rd stanza of Canto I, Book I, he gives a most realistic picture of the clouds of gnats pestering a gentle shepherd in the evening :—

As gentle shepherd in sweete eventide
When ruddy Phebus begins to welke in west,
High on an hill, his flocke to Vewen wide,
Marks which doe byte their hasty supper best ;
A cloud of cumbrous gnattes do him molest.
All striving to infixe their feeble stinges,
That from their noyance he no where can rest,
But with his clownish hands their tender wings,
He brusheth oft, and oft mar their murmurings.

And in stanzas IX-X in Canto XII, where Spenser has painted the symbolic dragon lying dead, the spectacle that rises before our eyes of the ceremonial procession that comes through the gate, the crowd of curious burger folk, the frightened children and their mothers, is a marvellous one. Some of the greatest painters would love to paint such a picture :

But when they came, where that dead Dragon lay,
Stretched on the ground in monstrous large extent,
The sight with ydle feare did them dismay,
No durst approach him nigh to touch, or once assay.

Spenser's imagery at times is splendid and gorgeous, and made on a large canvas. The best instance of this feature is the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins in Canto IV of Book I. The chariot of the Lady Pride being drawn by six outlandish beasts, lurching along amidst a rowdy company, looks almost like a circus-parade :—

So forth she comes, and to her coche does clyme
Adorned all with gold and girlonds gay,
That seemed as fresh as Flora in her prime ;
And strove to match in roiall rich array.
Great Junoes golden chayre, the which, they say,
The gods stand gazing on when she does ride
To Joves high bous through heavens bras-paved way,
Drawne of fayre Pecocks, that excel in pride
And full of Argus eyes their tayles dispredden wide.

Spenser's pictures are often detailed, distinct, definite and complete. He does not merely suggest but elaborates every detail. Such are the pictures of Speranza, "clad in blew", in the 14th Stanza, Canto X of Book I, and of Clarissa, "a woman in her freshest age" given in the 30th stanza.

She was a woman in her freshest age,
Of wondrous beauty, and of bounty rare,
With goodly grace and comely personage,

That was on earth not easie to compare ;
Full of great love, but Cupid's wanton snare ;
As hell she-hated ; chaste in worke and will ;
Her necke and breasts were ever open bare,
That aye therof her babes might sucke their fill
The rest was all in yellow robes arrayed still.

3. **Spenser's Diction and Versification.** Spenser was the first conscious inventor of a distinct poetic diction in England. When he started writing, Chaucer was considered the "God of English poetry". Spenser admired Chaucer and borrowed from him as he judged fit, but he soon discovered that English language was still in an unsettled state. He realised that a poet of vast resources like him, who wanted to treat great matters, must create a great form by enriching the English language, giving it colour and increasing flexibility and power. For this purpose he not only revived old forms, adopted from the language of street and market, homely but expressive words or combinations, but also imitated the foreign models. Regarding poetry as a means to persuade men to righteousness, he considered clarity as one of the fundamental canons of poetic diction. This lesson he learnt from the great rhetoricians like Quintilian and Cicero. Though Spenser's style is condemned as loose and repetitious, yet in comparison with his predecessors it is unusually close in texture, characterised by force, aptness of phrases and mataphors. By drawing upon various sources in order to enrich his style, Spenser gave it variety, which is one of the best qualities of the *Faerie Queene*. He was also very particular about the choice of words, which he selected to suit person and subject. The diction of the *Faerie Queene* varies from passage to passage to give a romantic, chivalric, religious or philosophic flavour as required by the poet. Spenser's language is full, copious to overflowing ; it is less pure and idiomatic than Chaucer's, but is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from the different languages of Europe.

It is a commonplace of criticism that Spenser, in Ben Jonson's phrase, "writ no language", that his dialect is not the dialect of any actual place or time, that it is "an artificial poetic diction", made up of Chaucer, Northern dialect, classicism, foreign words, and of miscellaneous archaism. No one can deny that Spenser's diction is different from the actually spoken or the ordinarily written language f the day ; but there was no actually spoken or ordinarily written tongue in Spenser's day, which could claim to be the "Queen's English". Chaucer was obsolete, and since Chaucer there was no single

person who could even pretend to authority. Every original writer was making experiments in order to devise an instrument of speech from popular talk and from classical and foreign models. The boldest of them all was Spenser who faced the situation bravely. He realised that for the purposes of great English poetry, there was need of a new language which could be made only by a poet. He treated the English language as if it belonged to him, and not he to it. He altered words, made one word do the duty of another, interchanged actives and passives, transferred epithets from their subjects, and gave them any shape that the case might demand. In this way he created a truly royal style—beautiful, flexible and magnificent, which could be imitated by the succeeding poets.

Spenser's greatest contribution to the art of English versification was the Spenserian stanza (a b a b b c b c c), which he used in the *Faerie Queene*. It was his own invention. It is wrong to consider, as some critics have suggested the idea, that Spenser borrowed this wonderful stanza from the Italians. It is possible that Chaucer's *octava rima* (a b a b a b c c), and *rhyme royal* (a b a b b c c), may have suggested the idea, but to admit this detracts in no way from the absolute originality of the Spenserian stanza. Its greatest merit is that it can easily adapt itself to the subject and style of the poem, and to the endless series of pictures and dissolving views which the poet, delight in the giving. As it can admit of an almost infinite variety of cadence, and composition, it saves the poem from monotony. Moreover, it suits Spenser's pictorial faculty as well as his musical faculty. It makes the verse of the *Faerie Queene* like a "river, wide, and deep, and strong, but maserating its waves and conveying them all in a steady, soft, irresistible sweep forwards." The added ninth line is a magnificent conclusion to the linked sweetness of the preceding eight, and in it the music of the whole stanza spreads and settles to a triumphant or quiet close. As it stands apart from the rest by reason of its length, it forms a distinct climax ; but as it is linked in rhyme with the foregoing quartain, it never suffers the sharp isolation that occasionally marks the final couplet of *octava rima* or the *rhyme royal*. It is admirably fitted for rounding off an episode, concluding a canto, or for sententious and reflective comment upon the situation.

4. **Spenser as an Allegorist:** Spenser lived in the age of transition when many revolutionary changes were taking place and nothing was settled. Through all the early portions of Elizabeth's reign in which the poetical genius of Spenser formed itself, the English nation, in its

most characteristic elements, showed the doubt and hesitancy always characteristic of times of transition. The clergy were hesitating between the old Catholic tradition and the new doctrine of the Reformation. The young queen still not sure of her own position was following a constantly changing foreign policy. The old nobility trained in the chivalrous feudal manners was being rapidly replaced by the new courtiers well-versed in Machiavalian statecraft. The new commercial classes were being hindered in their enterprise by the ancient and stable custom. Under such conditions it was difficult for an English poet to form a view, at once clear and comprehensive, of life and action.

Spenser had great sympathy for the old order that was passing away. He had great love for the time-honoured institutions of chivalry closely allied to Catholicism. He had great respect for its ideas of honour and courtesy, its exalted woman-worship and its sympathy for the poor and suffering. But at the same time, he was strongly impelled by the two counter movements—the Renaissance and the Reformation—which were tending to break down the old order. He had the zeal of a Protestant reformer and at the same time enthusiasm for the revival of learning by the European humanists. Spenser wanted to make the *Faerie Queene* a faithful mirror of the spirit of the age, and so the poetical problem he had to solve was how to present the action of those antagonistic forces in an ideal form with such an appearance of unity as should satisfy the primary requirements of his art.

Spenser turned to Allegory because it was the only way open to him to fuse these irreconcilable elements. By covering them with the veil of allegory he could disguise the essential opposition of things, and thus present faithfully the complex picture of his times. The only other literary form which could be used for this purpose was the drama, but nature and circumstances had denied him any share in it. Allegory seems to have had a special attraction for Spenser. His first published work was a version of allegorical poem by Petrarch and du Bellay, and he was sufficiently interested long afterwards to recast these early translations and to imitate them in an original series. The study of Plato may have helped to develop the taste in the allegory, but it was also quite a popular form in the medieval poetry which Spenser loved. In fact, Spenser's mind, at once meditative, and imaginative, and sensitive to the appearance as well as the significance of things, was perfectly suited to the allegorical form.

Being constitutionally of idealistic temper, he could most readily express in this medium the rich and varied interests of his mind that continually hovered between the words of fact and idea. So naturally he turned to allegory to wring out of himself and to make evident to others the fullest measure of significance perceptible in the outward show of things.

There is a very great difference of opinion among scholars about the meaning of allegory of the *Faerie Queene*. In spite of two centuries of research to find out what Spenser did mean by this and that person or episode, we are still not sure about their exact interpretation. It is on account of this confusion that a large number of the readers of *Faerie Queene*, who are very particular about its meaning, feel disgusted with it. Referring to this Prof. Tillyard has observed in *The English Epic and its Background* : "When Spenser is most himself, he translates his general feelings about life not into forms of men and nature that reminds us of the real world but into dehumanised or monstrous figures and into physical objects that correspond but vaguely to the objects we see and touch. If this method succeeds, it should have the advantage of great directness. There is no translating the feeling into and back from the world of men and of tangible objects. But, in compensation, the dead and artificial conceptions into which the poet translates his feelings so directly must be very apt to do their work; and the risk of signifying nothing is greater than in the more naturalistic method.

"I will illustrate from an episode from the Pastorella incident in Book Six of the *Faerie Queene*. While Calidore, the book's hero, was living the life of a shepherd and courting Pastorella, he wandered off one day alone and came on 'a place, who pleasaunce did appear to pass others on the earth'. This was a hill, set in an open country girt with high trees, and crowned with a spacious plot of flat ground, a perfect dancing place. Hearing the sound of a pipe and yet fearing to appear in the open, he kept within the covert of the wood and looked to see what was going on. What he saw was the dance of 'an hundred naked, Maidens lily white' in a ring, three other ladies within this ring, and in the very centre a single girl. All these are dancing to the music of Colin Clout.

"In the conversation that follows we learn that the maidens were graces, the three dancers the three Chief Graces, and the single girl Colin Clout's betrothed. We know already that Colin Clout is Spenser himself. The general feeling the poet seeks to convey is the

rapture and elusiveness of poetic inspiration. The episode itself is intensely alive but is concerned neither with living characters nor with events that could occur in actual life."

To such readers and critics who appreciate the beauties of the *Faerie Queene*, but are perplexed by the meanings, Hazlitt gave the best advice when he remarked : "But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but they cannot understand it on account of the allegory. They are afraid of the allegory as if they thought it would bite them: they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in the shining folds. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as pick-staff." In other words, it is always possible to enjoy the poem without troubling oneself about the allegory at all, except in its broad ethical features, which are quite unmistakable. The greatness of the *Faerie Queene* does not depend on its allegory; it depends on the emotional effect which it produces. In a great work of art, allegory ceases to have value for imaginations. If a poem is to deserve the name of a great religious poem, it must be in virtue of the impression it makes on the imagination and feelings, and not because one can with sufficient ingenuity pick out of it a moral or religious lesson. Among the poems that the world has decided to accept as masterpieces, the *Faerie Queene* takes an important place and it is by this poem that Spenser holds his sovereign place among the foremost English poets. It is, in fact, a miracle of sustained and extended beauty. To ignore such a poem simply because of its complex and confusing allegory is not at all justified.

CHAPTER III

DONNE AND THE POST-ELIZABETHAN POETS

After the Elizebethan Period which ended in 1603, there followed the decline of the Renaissance spirit. We no longer find great imaginative writers of the stature of Shakespeare, Spenser and Sidney. There is a marked change in temperament which may be called essentially modern. Though during the Elizabethan period, the new spirit of the Renaissance had broken away with the medieval times, and started a new development, in fact it was in the seventeenth century that this task of breaking away with the past was completely accomplished, and the modern spirit, in the fullest sense of the term, came into being. This spirit may be defined as the spirit of observation and of preoccupation with details, and a systematic analysis of facts, feelings and ideas.

The post-Elizabethan poetry, also called the Jacobean and Caroline poetry during the reigns of James I (1603—25) and Charles I (1625—49) respectively, can be divided into three parts: (*i*) **Poetry of the School of Spenser ;** (*ii*) **Poetry of the Cavalier Poets ;** (*iii*) **Poetry of the Metaphysical School.**

(*i*) **The School of Spenser.** The Spenserians were the followers of Spenser. In spite of the changing conditions and literary tastes which resulted in a reaction against the diffuse, flamboyant, Italianate poetry which Spenser and Sidney had made fashionable during the sixteenth century, they preferred to follow Spenser and considered him as their master.

The most thorough-going disciples of Spenser during the reign of James I were **Phineas Fletcher** (1582-1648) and **Giles Fletcher** (1583-1623). They were both priests and Fellows of Cambridge University. Phineas Fletcher wrote a number of Spenserian pastorals and allegories. His most ambitious poem, *The Purple Island,* portrays in a minutely detailed allegory the physical and mental constitution of man, the struggle between Temperance and his foes, the Will of man and Satan. Though the poem follows the allegorical pattern of the *Faerie Queene*, it does not lift us to the realm of pure romance as

does Spenser's masterpiece, and at times the strain of the allegory becomes too unbearable.

Giles Fletcher was more lyrical and mystical than his brother, and he also made a happier choice of subjects. His *Christ's Victorie and Triumph in Heaven and Earth over and after Death* (1610), which is an allegorical narrative describing in a lyrical strain the Atonement, Temptation, Crucifiction, and Ressurection of Christ, is a link between the religious poetry of Spenser and Milton. It is written in a flamboyant, diffuse style of Spenser, but its ethical aspect is in keeping with the seventeenth century theology which considered man as a puny creature in the divine scheme of salvation.

Other poets who wrote under the influence of Spenser were **William Browne** (1590-1645), **George Wither** (1588-1667), and **William Drummond** (1585-1649).

Browne's important poetical work is *Britannia's Pastorals* which shows all the characteristics of Elizabethan pastoral poetry. It is obviously inspired by Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Sidneys' *Arcadia* as it combines allegory with satire. It is a story of wooing and adventure, of the nymphs who change into streams and flowers. It also sings the praises of virtue and of poets dead and living.

The same didactic tone and lyrical strain are noticed in the poetry of George **Wither**. His best-known poems are *The Shepherds' Hunting*—a series of personal eclogues (short pastoral poems); *Fidella*, an heroic epistle (a verse composition in letter form) of over twelve hundred lines; and *Fair Virtue, the Mistress of Philareto*, a sustained and detailed lyrical eulogy of an ideal woman. Most of Wither's poetry is pastoral which is used by him to convey his personal experiences. He writes in an easy, and homely style free from conceits. He often dwells on the charms of nature and consolation provided by songs. In his later years Wither wrote didactic and satirical verse, which earned for him the title of "our English Juvenal".

Drummond who was a Scottish poet, wrote a number of pastorals, sonnets, songs, elegies and religious poems. His poetry is the product of a scholar of refined nature, high imaginative faculty, and musical ear. His indebtedness to Spenser, Sidney and Shakespeare in the matter of fine phraseology is quite obvious. The greate and original quality of all his poetry is the sweetnesss and music: evolution in which he has few rivals even among the Elizabethan lyricists. His well-known poems are : *Tears on the Death of Maliades* (*an elegy*), *Sonnets*, *Flowers of Sion* and Pastorals.

(*ii*) **The Cavalier Poets.** The Cavalier poets followed the lead of Ben Jonson. Jonson followed the classical method in his poetry as in his drama. He imitated Horace by writing, like him, satires, elegies, epistles and complimentary verses. But though his verse possesses classical dignity and good sense, it does not have its grace and ease. His lyrics and songs also differ from those of Shakespeare. Whereas Shakespeare's songs are pastoral, popular and 'artless', Jonson's are sophisticated particularised, and have intellectual and emotional rationality.

The label 'Cavalier' is not correct, because a 'Cavalier' means a royalist—one who fought on the side of the king during the Civil War. The followers of Ben Jonson were not all royalists, but this label once used has stuck to them. Moreover, there is not much difference between the Cavalier and Metaphysical poets. Some Cavalier poets like Carew, Suckling and Lovelace were also disciples of Donne. Even some typical poems of Donne and Ben Jonson are very much alike. These are, therefore, not two distinct schools, but they represented two groups of poets who followed two different masters—Donne and Ben Jonson. Poets of both the schools, of course, turned away from the long, old-fashioned works of the Spenserians, and concentrated their efforts on short poems and lyrics dealing with the themes of love of woman and the love or fear of God. The Cavalier poets normally wrote about trivial subjects, while the Metaphysical poets wrote generally about serious subjects.

The important Cavalier poets were **Herrick, Lovelace, Suckling** and **Carew**. Though they wrote generally in a lighter vein, yet they could not completely escape the tremendous seriousness of Puritanism. **Carew** and **Herrick** will be dealt with among the Metaphysical poets. **Sir John Suckling** (1609—1642), a courtier of Charles I, wrote poetry because it was considered a gentleman's accomplishment in those days. Most of his poems are trivial, written in doggeral verse. **Sir Richard Lovelace** (1618—1658) was another follower of King Charles I. His volume of love lyrics—*Lucasta*—are on a higher plane than Suckling's work, and some of his poems like "To Lucasta," and "To Althea, from Prison," have won a secure place in English poetry.

(*iii*) **Donne and the Metaphysicals.** The Metaphysical poets were **John Donne, Herrick, Thomas Carew, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, George Herbert** and **Lord Herbert of Cherbury.** The leader of the school was Donne. They are

called the metaphysical poets not because they are highly philosophical, but because their poetry is full of conceits, exaggerations, quibblings about the meaning of words, display of learning and far-fetched similes and metaphors. It was Dr. Johnson who in his essay on Abraham Cowley in his *Lives of the Poets* used the term 'metaphysical'. There he wrote:

"About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets. The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour ; but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear ; for the modulation was so imperfect that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables."

Though Dr. Johnson was prejudiced against the mataphysical school of poets, and the above statement is full of exaggeration, yet he pointed out the salient characteristics of this school. One important feature of the metaphysical school which Dr. Johnson mentioned was "Their discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." Moreover, he was absolutely right when he further remarked that the metaphysical poets were perversely strange and strained. "The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions... Their wish was only to say what had never been said before."

Dr. Johnson, however, did not fail to notice that beneath the superficial novelty of the metaphysical poets lay a fundamental originality :

"If they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth ; if the conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write on their plan, it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet nor assume the dignity of a writer, by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery, and volubility of syllables."

The metaphysical poets were honest, original thinkers. They tried to analyse their feelings and experiences—even the experience of love. They were also aware of the life beyond life, and were concerned with death, burial, descent into hell etc. Though they

hoped for immortality, they were obssessed by the consciousness of mortality, which was often expressed in a mood of sickly disgust.

John Donne (1537—1631),the leader of the Metaphysical school of poets, had a very chequered career until he became the Dean of St. Paul. Though his main work was to deliver religious sermons, he wrote poetry of a very high order. His best-known works are *The Progress of the Soul ; An Anatomy of the World, an elegy ;* and *Epithalamium.* His poetry can be divided into three parts: (1) Amorous, (2) Metaphysical, (3) Satirical. In his amorous lyrics which include his earliest work, he broke away from the Petrarcan model so popular among the Elizabethan poets, and expressed the experience of love in a realistic manner. His metaphysical and satirical works, which form the major portion of his poetry, were written in later years. *The Progress of the Soul* and *Metampsychosis,* in which Donne pursues the passage of the soul through various transmigrations, including those of a bird and fish, is a fine illustration of his metaphysical poetry. A good illustration of his satire is his fourth satire describing the character of a bore. They were written in rhymed couplet, and influenced both Dryden and Pope.

Donne has often been compared to Browning on account of his metrical roughness, obscurity, ardent imagination, taste for metaphysics and unexpected divergence into sweet and delightful music. But there is one important difference between Donne and Browning. Donne is a poet of wit, while Browning is a poet of ardent passion. Donne deliberately broke away from the Elizabethen tradition of smooth sweetness of verse, and introduced a harsh and stuccato method. His influence on the contemporary poets was far from being desirable, because whereas they imitated his harshness, they could not come up to the level of his original thought and sharp wit. Like Browning, Donne has no sympathy for the reader who cannot follow his keen and incisive thought, while his poetry is most difficult to understand because of its careless versification and excessive terseness.

Thus with Donne, the Elizabethan poet with its mellifluousness, and richly observant imagination, came to an end, and the Caroline poetry with its harshness and deeply reflective imagination began. Though Shakespeare and Spenser still exerted some influence on the poets, yet Donne's influence was more dominant.

Robert Herrick (1591—1674) wrote amorous as well as religious verse, but it is on account of the poems of the former type—love

poems, for which he is famous. He has much in common with the Elizabethan song writers, but on account of his pensive fantasy, and a meditative strain especially in his religious verse, Herrick is included in the metaphysical school of Donne.

Thomas Carew (1598—1639), on whom the influence of Donne was stronger, was the finest lyric writer of his age. Though he lacks the spontaneity and freshness of Herrick, he is superior to him in fine workmanship. Moreover, though possessing the strength and vitality of Donne's verse, Carew's verse is neither rugged nor obscure as that of the master. His *Persuasions of Love* is a fine piece of rhythmic cadence and harmony.

Richard Crashaw (1613?—1649) possessed a temperament different from that of Herrick or Carew. He was a fundamentally religious poet, and his best work is *The Flaming Heart.* Though less imaginative than Herrick, and intellectually inferior to Carew at times Crashaw reaches the heights of rare excellence in poetry.

Henry Vaughan (1622—1695), though a mystic like Crashaw, was equally at home in sacred as well as secular verse. Though lacking the vigour of Crashaw, Vaughan is more uniform and clear, tranquil and deep.

George Herbert (1593—1633) is the most widely read of all the poets belonging to the metaphysical school, except, of course Donne. This is due to the clarity of his expression and the transparency of his conceits. In his religious verse there is simplicity as well as natural earnestness. Mixed with the didactic strain there is also a current of quaint humour in his poetry.

Lord Herbert of Cherbury is inferior as a verse writer to his brother George Herbert, but he is best remembered as the author of an autobiography. Moreover, he was the first poet to use the metre which was made famous by Tennyson in *In Memoriam.*

Other poets who are also included in the group of Metaphysicals are **Abraham Cowley** (1618—1667), **Andrew Marvel** (1621—1672), and **Edmund Waller** (1606—1687). Cowley is famous for his 'Pindaric Odes', which influenced English poetry throughout the eighteenth century. Marvel is famous for his loyal Friendship of Milton, and because his poetry shows the conflict between the two schools of Spenser and Donne. Waller was the first to use the 'closed' couplet which dominated English poetry for the next century.

The metaphysical poets show the spiritual and moral fervour of the Puritans as well as the frank, amorous tendency of the Elizabethans. Sometimes like the Elizabethans they sing of making the best of life as it lasts—Gather ye Rosebuds while ye may ; and at other times they seek more permanent comfort in the delight of spiritual experience.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Donne became the stock example of a man whose wit was greater than his poetry, and whose versification was lamentable. Dryden wrote in *A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693) :

"Would not Donne's *Satires*, which abound with so much wit, appear more charming, if he had taken care of his words, and of his numbers ?

"He affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign ; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softness of love."

But this belief about Donne's poetry disappeared in the later part of the nineteenth century and some prominent critics have given him a high place among English poets. For example, Dowden in his introduction to *The Poetry of John Donne* (1890) wrote :

"There is indeed a large expense of spirit in the poems of Donne, an expense of spirit not always judicious or profitable, and the reader who comes with reasonable expectations will get a sufficient reward. When prospecting for gold the miner considers himself fortunate if he can reckon on finding some twenty-five pennyweights of the precious metal in a ton of quartz and wash-dirt. The prospector in the lesser poetry of any former age must be content to crush a good deal of quartz and wash a good deal of sand in the expectation of an ounce of pure gold. But by vigour and perseverance in the pursuit large fortunes may be amassed.

"Donne as a poet is certainly difficult of excess. How shall we approach him, how effect an entrance ? With different authors we need different methods of approach, different kinds of cunning to become free of their domain. Some must be taken by storm, some must be entreated, caressed, wheedled into acquiescence. There are poets who in a single lyric give us, as it were, a key which admits us to the mastery of all their wealth. Towards others we must make

an indirect advance, we must reach them through the age which they represent, or the school in which they have been teachers or pupils. It is as the founder of a school of English poetry that Donne is ordinarily set before us. We are told that in the decline of the greater poetry of the Elizabethan period a 'metaphysical school' arose, and that Donne was the founder or the first eminent member of this school. I do not believe in the existence of this so-called 'metaphysical school'. Much of the most characteristic poetry of Donne belongs to the flood tide hour of Elizabethan literature; to the time when Spenser was at work on the later books of the *Faerie Queene* and Shakespeare was producing his early histories and comedies. The delights in subtleties of the thought, in over-ingenious fantasies, in far-fetched imagery, in curiosity, and not always felicitous curiosity of expression was common to almost all the writers of the period. The dramatists were to some extent preserved from the abuse of fantastic ingenuity by the fact that they wrote for a popular audience, and must have failed unless they were at once intelligible. But authors of prose as well as authors in verse were fascinated by subtleties of fancy; the theologian and the philosopher, as well as the poet, swung in the centre of a spider's web of fantasies.

> 'All the waving mesh
> Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbrow-edged.'

There was no special coterie or school of 'metaphysical poets', but this writer or that yielded with more *abandon* than the rest to a tendency of the time.

"It is not then by studying Donne as the leader of school that we shall come to understand him. We get access to his writings, I believe, most readily through his life, and through an interest is his character as an individual."

Prof. Saintsbury in his *Introduction to Donne's Poems* (1896) wrote: "He was 'of the first order of poets'; but he was not of the first among the first...... It is seldom that even for a few lines, seldomer that for a few stanzas, the power of the furnace is equal to the volume of ore and fuel that we thrust into it. But the fire is always there over-tasked, over-mastered for a time; but never checked or extinguished; and ever and anon from gaps in the smouldering mass there breaks forth such a sudden flow of pure molten metal, such a flower of incandescence, as not even in the very greatest poets of all can be ever surpassed or even rivalled...

"But for those who have experienced, or at least understand, the ups-and-downs, the ins-and-outs of human temperament, the alternations not merely of passion and satiety, but of passion and laughter, of passion and melancholy reflection, of passion earthly enough and spiritual rapture almost heavenly, there is no poet and hardly any writer like Donne. They may even be tempted to see in the strangely mixed and flamed character of his style, an index and reflection of the variety and rapid changes of his thought and feeling. To the praise of the highest• poetical art he cannot indeed lay claim. He is of course entitled to the benefit of the pleas that it is uncertain whether he ever prepared definitely for the press a single poetical work of his; that it is certain that his age regarded his youth with too much disapproval to bestow any critical care on his youthful poems... But if Donne cannot receive the praise due to the accomplished poetical artist, he has that not perhaps higher but certainly rarer, of the inspired poetical creator... To express infinity no doubt is a contradiction in terms. But no poet has gone nearer to the hinting and adumbration of this infinite quality of passion, and of the relapses and reactions from passions, than the author of *The Second Anniversary* and *The Ecstasy*.

Sir Edmund Gosse, in his *The Life and Letters of John Donne* (1899) wrote: "We read Donnes, however, to little purpose if we do not perceive that he was above all things sincere. His writings, like his actions, were faulty, violent, a little morbid even, and abnormal. He was not, and did not attempt to be, an average man. But actions and writings alike, in their strangeness and aloofness, were unadulterated by a tinge of affectation...

"The modern appreciation of Donne seems to begin with Robert Browning, who met with his poems when he was still a boy (about 1827) and was greatly influenced by them. He put the Mandrake song to music. He quoted and praised the Dean so constantly in later years that Miss Barret noticed it early in their aquaintance; 'your Donne,' she says on several occasions. The stamp of Dean's peculiar intensity of feeling can be traced in any of Browning's lyrics; his famous 'obscurity' is closely analogous to Donne's."

Raleigh in his book *Milton*, wrote in 1900: "When Milton does fall into a vein of conceit, it is generally both trivial and obvious, with none of the saving quality of Donne's remoter extravagances. In Donne they are hardly extravagances; the vast overshadowing

canopy of his imagination seems to bring the most widely dissimilar things together with ease. To his unfettered and questioning thought the real seems unreal, the unreal real; he moves in a world of shadows, cast by the lurid light of his emotions; they take grotesque shapes and beckon to him, or terrify him. All realities are immaterial and insubstantial; they shift their expressions, and lurk in many forms, leaping forth from the most unlikely disguises, and vanishing as suddenly as they came."

Grierson in *The Poems of John Donne* (1912) wrote: "Alike in his poetry, and in his soberest prose, treatise or sermon, Donne's mind seems to want the high seriousness which comes from a conviction that truth is, and is to be found. A spirit of scepticism and paradox plays through and disturbs almost everything he wrote, except at moments when an intense mood of feeling, whether love or devotion, begets faith, and silences the sceptical and destructive wit by the power of vision rather than of intellectual conviction. Poles apart as the two poets seem at first glance to lie in feeling and art, there is yet something of Tennyson in the conflict which wages perpetually in Donne's poetry between feeling and intellect.

"But short of the highest gifts of serene imagination or serene wisdom Donne's mind has every power it well could, wit, insight, imagination; and these move in such a strange medium of feeling and learning; medieval, renaissance and modern, that every imprint becomes of interest.

"But it is not true either that the thought and the imagery of love-poetry be of the simple, obvious kind which Steele supposes, that any display of dialectical subtlety, any scintillation of wit, must be fatal to the impression of sincerity and feeling, or on the other hand that love is always a beautiful emotion naturally expressing itself in delicate and beautiful languages. To some natures love comes as above all things a force quickening the mind, intensifying its purely intellectual energy, opening new vistas of thought abstract and subtle, making the soul 'intensely, wondrously alive'. Of such were Donne and Browning...

"Donne's love poetry is a very complex phenomenon but the two dominant strains in it are just these: the strain of dialectic, subtle play of argument and wit, erudite and fantastic; and the strain of vivid realism, the record of a passion, which is not ideal or conventional, neither recollected in tranquillity nor a pure product of literary fashion, but love as an actual immediate experience in all its

moods, gay and angry, scornful and rapturous with joy, touched with tenderness and darkened with sorrow—though these last two moods, the commonest in love-poetry, are with Donne the rarest."

T.S. Eliot who is the greatest supporter of Donne, and is mainly responsible for establishing his reputation as a major English poet, wrote in *Donne in Our Time* (*A Garland for John Donne*): "I believe that Donne's poetry is a concern of the present and the recent past, rather than of the future.

"I by no means wish to affirm that the importance of a particular poet, or of a particular type of poetry, is merely a matter of capricious fashion, I wish simply to distinguish between the absolute and the relative in popularity, and to recognise in the relative (both when a poet is unduly preferred and when he is unduly ignored) an element of the reasonable, the just and the significant.

And detaching Donne from his relation to a particular generation, our own, a relation which may never be repeated at any subsequent time, this I think we can say at least. Donne will remain permanently in a higher place than he has occupied before. For he was a great reformer of the English language, of English verse. We may continue always to find him more of a poet, of deeper knowledge and more intense and moving expression, than Dryden; but here we can compare him favourably to Dryden in the very matter in which Dryden deserves our warmest gratitude and admiration. The verse of Dryden was once thought artificial, pedestrian and prosaic; just as in a previous century the verse of Donne was thought to be artificial, pedestrian and prosaic, as well as uncouth. But in truth Dryden and Donne are both highly natural; and the merit of both is to have established a natural conversational diction instead of a conventional one. Each effected a revolution of the kind which has to occur from time to time, which will have to occur again in nearly measurable time, if the English language is to retain its vigour.

"The revolutionary activity of Donne is not so immediately apparent as that of Dryden, because it began before the previous revolution, that of dramatic blank verse, was exhausted. For the age of Shakespeare, blank verse was the perfect vehicle for impassioned thought, and indeed Shakespeare himself succeeded in getting more thought expressed in great verse than any English poet before or after it. But lyric verse, under these conditions, remained subordinate to the musical instrument and to the dramatic setting.

"It is hardly too much to say that Donne enlarged the possibility of lyric verse as no other English poet has done. M. Legouis has pointed out very pertinently how largely his lyrics are dramatic, in monologue and dialogue.

"But Donne effected not only a development, but a reform, of the language, just as Dryden, in his turn, reformed the language from the excesses of the minor followers of Donne. The minor Elizabethan dramatists sometimes tormented the language; where the content is often quite simple, the expression is perverse. In the verse of Donne the thought is sometimes over-ingenious and perverse, but the language is always pure and simple. The conceit itself is primarily an eccentricity of imagery, the far-fetched association of the dissimilar, or the over-elaboration of one metaphor or simile... Donne introduced the natural or conversational style, which the Elizabethans at their best had excelled in producing in a highly sophisticated metric of blank verse, into the lyric ; he first made it possible to think in lyric verse, and in a variety of rythms and stanza schemes which forms an inexhaustible subject of study ; and at the same time retained a quality of song and the suggestion of the instrumental accompaniment of the earlier lyric. No poet has excelled him in his peculiar combination of qualities.

"Such, I believe, are some of the conclusions of praise which another generation, not enjoying the fulness of satisfaction in Donne that we have felt, will be able to confer on him. For one age or another his personality may be no more interesting than has been, for the last seventy-five years or so, the personality of Byron. But at any time Donne ought always to be recognised as one of the few great reformers and preservers of the English tongue."

Now let us briefly state the main characteristics of Donne as a poet :

(1) **Donne as the Poet of Love.** Donne is one of the greatest of English love-poets. In fact among all the English love-poets he is the only complete amorist. His capacity for experience is unique, and his conscience as a writer towards every kind of it allows of no compromise in the duty of doing justice to each. The poetry of lust has never been written with more minute truth, but then neither has the poetry of love transcending sex.

Donne was an innovator of a new kind of love-poetry. (ii) Elizabethan love-poetry was written on the Patrarchan model

following the pattern set by the Italian poets like Dante, Ariosto and Petrarch. The love songs and sonnet sequences of Spenser, Sidney, Watson, Davidson and Drummond described the pains and sorrows of love—the sorrow of absence, the pain of rejection, the incomparable beauty of the lady and her unwavering cruelty. They seldom (except some of the finest of Shakespeare's sonnets) dealt with the joy of love, the deep contentment of mutual passion. Morever they made use of a series of constantly recurring images, of rain and wind, of fire, of ice, of storm and of warfare; comparisons and allusions to Venus and Cupid, Cynthia and Apollo etc. as well as abstractions such as Love and Fortune, Beauty and Disdain.

John Donne was the first English poet to challenge and break the supremacy of Petrarchan tradition. Though at time he adopts the Petrarchan pose also, yet the imagery and rhythm, the texture and colour of the bulk of his love poetry are different. Moreover, there are three distinct strains in his love poetry—cynical, the Platonic, and of conjugal love. A number of his popular songs as 'Go and catch a falling star', 'Send home my long stray'd eyes to me', or such lyrics as *Woman's Constancy*, *The Indifferent*, *Aire and Angels*, *the Dream*, *The Appreciation* and many others, are written in a cynical strain. The love which he portrays is not impassioned, courtly or chivalric, but intellectual love in which art plays a predominant part.

Poems like *Twickenham Garden*, *The Funerall*, *The Blossom*, *The Primrose*, which were probably addressed to the high-born lady friends, are written in high vein. He boasts that,

> Differences of sex no more we knew
> Than our guardian angels do ;
> Coming and going we
> Perchance might kiss, but not between these meals.
> Our hands never touched the seals
> Which nature, injured by late law, sets free ;
> These miracles we did ; but now alas
> All measure, and all language I should pass,
> Should I tell what a miracle she was.

In the lyrics which were probably addressed to his wife the conjugal strain predominates. To this class belongs the exquisite song :

> Sweetest love, I do not go
> For weariness of thee,
> Nor in hope the world can show
> A fitter love for me.

In the same vein, and on the same theme, are the *Veledict‍ion of Weeping* :

> O more than moon,
> Draw not up seas to down me in thy sphere;
> Weep not dead in thine arms, but forbear
> To teach the sea what it may do too soon.

(2) **Donne as a Satirist.** Donne occupies an important place among English satirists. He may be considered as the percusor of that sudden outburst of formal satire and satirical comedy which distinguishes the last years of the sixteenth century and in which the new generation consisting especially of the educated persons began to react against most of the literary ideals and fashions which had hitherto prevailed. They insisted on seeing things as they are, and not through rose-coloured spectacles. There was a reaction against the early romanticism and idealism; a disenchanted resolve to be at all costs realistic to see things and show things as they really were, and to describe them (as Jonson put it) in 'language such as men do use'. Among the satirists of his age, Donne was the first in the field.

Like the Elizabethans as well as contemporary satirists, Donne is harsh in his satires. Like the Roman satirists—Horace, Juvenal and Persius, whom he imitated, Donne gives generalisations about human nature, its weaknesses and ruling passions, illustrated by occasional examples which seldom descend to minute detail. Donne deliberately cultivated the harshness of his models, because he considered it as indispensable. In fact, when Dryden complained against the harshness of Donne's verse, he was obviously referring to his satires.

In all Donne wrote five satires. In the First Satire Donne ridicules his friend's inconstancy and absurdity in love. In the Second Satire, he satirises the poets who starve themselves by writing for idiot actors, who 'write to Lords, rewards to get', and who plagiarise. He also ridicules men who take up the practice of law for mere gain, and who 'combining law with usury, cheat prodigal heirs out of their estates'.

In the Third Satire Donne makes a search for true religion and examines the rival claims of the Roman and the Anglican Church in order to discover the truth on which the soul's salvation depended. Here we find the eagerly sincere mind of Donne impatient of all hypocrisy and deception.

In the Fourth Satire which is the longest, and the roughest in versification, Donne reflects on the folly and futility of those who work in the royal Court. Here there is no clear plan or dominant idea, and the various parts do not co-operate to produce a harmonious whole.

In the Fifth and last of Donne's satire, he redicules suitors and law officers. This satire was written by Donne mainly for displaying his wit, because he does not seem to be inspired by the subject.

It is only in the Third Satire dealing with true religion, in which Donne seems to be inspired by the subject, and in which he writes with moral earnestness. In others there is an absence of clear outline and plan, and a tendency to indulge in mere wit for its own sake.

3. **Donne as a Religious Poet.** Donne holds an important place in the religious poetry of England. In fact, in certain respects, he is an innovator of a new type of religious poetry. In his religious poems also Donne is 'metaphysical', rather than didactic, because here he analyses and lays bare his various moods in search of God, and thus these poems resemble his love-poems and satires.

Unlike the satires and love-poems which were written during his youth, the religious hymns and sonnets were written in his closing years. But in all his poems there runs the same intense and subtle spirit, and same searching analysis of passion. The intention of Donne in his religious poems is not to preach, but to express himself, and analyse his moods of agitation, of aspiration and humiliation in the quest of God, and the surrender of his soul to Him. He is the first introspective and intensely personal religious poet of the seventeenth century, and even if the poem is a sermon, it is pirmarily a confession or a prayer.

The main theme of the religious poems of Donne is 'the frailty and decay of this world'. Like many of the intellectuals of his day, Donne felt that the world was out of joint, and that it was in the process of rapid degeneration. Other important themes of Donne's religious poems are the insignificance of man himself, the antithesis between the body and the spirit, the transitoriness and unsatisfactoriness of all earthly enjoyments, the pangs suffered by the soul in the imprisoning body. Thus he writes in *Second Anneversarie* :

And what essential joy can'st thou expect
Here upon earth ? What permanent effect
Of transitory causes ? Dost thou love
Beauty ? (And beauty worthy'st is to move)
Poor cousened causenor, *that* she, and *that* thou,
Which did begin to love, are neither now :
You are both fluid, chang'd since yesterday
Next day repairs, (but ill) last day's decay.

Like Donne's love-poetry, his religious poetry also bears an unmistakable stamp of his personality. It is not written in a conventional, didactic style, bringing home to the readers certain religious doctrines. On the other hand, it is highly individualistic and personal as all Donne's poetry is, and it gives expression to his highly complex personality. There was always another-worldly element in Donne, a certain detachment from life ; but, although he increasingly felt that the world was vanity, he could never quite liberate himself from it, and oscillation between worldliness and other-worldliness, in this increasing longing to make the unworldly element in himself prevail over the worldly, lies the drama of his religious poetry. Donne's poetry is religious not in the sense that it follows the Christian doctrines, but in the sense that it expresses man's effort to bring his own will into confirmity with a transcendent will and purpose which he considered to be divine. In fact in his religious poetry he expresses those ideas on which all religions agree. He believes in religion in the most primary and fundamental sense, and asks for purgation, purification and illumination. Thus the religion of this complex and subtle personality is very simple. In fact what he longs for in most of his religious poems is the exchange of his complex personality for the singleness and simplicity of a soul :

Father of Heaven, and him, by whom
It, and us for it, and all else, for us
Thou madest and govern'st ever, come
And re-create me, now grown ruinous :
My heart is by dejection, clay,
And by self-murder, red.
From this red earth, O Father, purge away
All vicious tinctures, that new fashioned
I may rise up from death ; before I am dead.

4. **Donne as a Metaphysical Poet.** Donne is the greatest of metaphysical poets not in the sense that his poetry is an embodiment of a certain profound philosophy of life, but in the sense in which the word is now commonly used for poetry which is argumen-

tative, scholastic and fantastic. Thus when Dryden remarked that Donne affected the metaphysics even in his love poems, he was using the word not in the larger philosophical sense, but in the sense in which it is now commonly used. A truly metaphysical or philosophical poet is one who, whether he employs traditional or technical philosophic concepts or not, tries to express, according to the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth, a vision of life as a whole. Donne in his poems does not try to express such a vision; they are only accidentally or superficially, philosophical or metaphysical. Most of Donne's poems, including even some of the best of the *Songs and Sonnets*, are poetical arguments, sometimes serious, sometimes frivolous, and whether or not in such poems he makes use of theological, scholastic, or so-called metaphysical concepts is almost accidental. In fact, therefore, he may far more appropriately be called an argumentative or dialectical poet than a metaphysical poet. For it is not merely his logical or argumentative capacity that distinguishes and differentiates a philosopher or a philosophic poet: it is his capacity to see life as a whole and to understand the meaning of life as a whole. In this respect Milton in his *Paradise Lost* manifests himself as a metaphysical or philosophical poet, because, in spite of the fact that he proved nothing in the poem, yet he was able to give a new vision of the story of the fall and redemption of man as told in the Bible.

Donne was the leader of the school of poets, now called the 'Metaphysical school', on account of its scholasticism and fantastic style rather than for its philosophy. But he was superior to the other members of the school in certain very important aspects. He was the first poet to express his amorous and religious experience with the new psychological curiosity. Moreover, to the game of elaborate, fantastic conceits and hyperboles which was the fashion throughout Europe in those days, he brought not only a full-blooded temperament and an acute mind, but a vast and growing store of scholarly and religious learning. It was the privilege of Donne to combine all elements of the Renaissance spirit—the haunting meditation on death, the passionate attention to love, the blend of classical and romantic form.

Donne's strongest as well as his weakest point is his wit. It is this which at times gives him a position of honour among the poets of England, and at times when done to excess, exposes him to ridicule. He never makes use of the commonplace, easy and familiar imagery. At the risk of being obscure, he takes pleasure

only in the subtle. His play of wit sometimes results in hyperbole. For example, he excuses himself for mistaking his mistress for an angel on the ground that to imagine her other than she is would be profane. Or he incongruously brings together ideas as remote from each other as the antipodes, mingling the lofty and the mean, the sublimes and the trivial. He deduces every kind of consequence from the fact that a flea hops from biting him to suck the blood of his mistress. He will not let her kill this creature in which their blood was mingled, and which is therefore their bridal bed, the temple of their learning. Wit and conceit abound in Sidney and Shakespeare, but in them they are an ornament, an occasional grace. In Donne it is everywhere. It is his very genius, and fashions his feelings and his thought. His muse loves those sudden flights from the material to the spiritual sphere for which Dryden gave him and Johnson confirmed to him, the title of 'Metaphysical.'

CHAPTER IV

MILTON AND THE PURITAN AGE

The seventeenth century up to 1660, when monarchy was restored and Charles II came to throne, was dominated by Puritanism, and it may be called the Puritan Age or the Age of Milton who was the noblest representative of the Puritan spirit. Broadly speaking, the Puritan movement in literature may be considered as the second and greater Renaissance, marked by the rebirth of the moral nature of man which followed the intellectual awakening of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Though the Renaissance brought with it culture, it was mostly sensuous and pagan, and it needed some sort of moral sobriety and profundity which were contributed by the Puritan movement. Moreover, during the Renaissance period despotism was still the order of the day, and in politics and religion unscrupulousness and fanaticism were rampant. The Puritan movement stood for liberty of the people from the shackles of the despotic ruler as well as the introduction of morality and high ideals in politics. Thus it had two objects—personal righteousness and civil and religious liberty. In other words, it aimed at making men honest and free.

Though during the Restoration period the Puritans began to be looked upon as narrow-minded, gloomy dogmatists, who were against all sorts of recreations and amusements, in fact they were not so. Moreover, though they were profoundly religious, they did not form a separate religious sect. It would be a grave travesty of facts if we call Milton and Cromwell, who fought for liberty of the people against the tyrannical rule of Charles I, as narrow-minded fanatics. They were the real champions of liberty and stood for toleration.

The name Puritan was at first given to those who advocated certain changes in the form of worship of the reformed English Church under Elizabeth. As King Charles I and his councillors, as well as some of the clergymen with Bishop Laud as their leader, were opposed to the movement, Puritanism in course of time became a national movement against the tyrannical rule of the king, and

stood for the liberty of the people. Of course, the extremists among Puritans were fanatics and stern, and the long-protracted struggle against despotism made even the milder ones hard and narrow. So when Charles I was defeated and beheaded in 1649 and Puritanism came out triumphant with the establishment of the Commonwealth under Cromwell, severe laws were passed. Many simple modes of recreation and amusement were banned, and an austere standard of living was imposed on an unwilling people. But when we criticise the Puritan for his restrictions on simple and innocent pleasures of life, we should not forget that it was the same very Puritan who fought for liberty and justice, and who through self-discipline and austere way of living overthrew despotism and made the life and property of the people of England safe from the tyranny of rulers.

In literature of the Puritan Age we find the same confusion as we find in religion and politics. The medieval standard of chivalry, the impossible loves and romances, which we find in Spenser and Sidney, have completely disappeared. As there were no fixed literary standards, imitations of older poets and exaggerations of the 'metaphysical' poets replaced the original, dignified and highly imaginative compositions of the Elizabethan writers. The literary achievements of this so-called gloomy age are not of a high order, but it had the honour of producing one solitary master of verse, whose work would shed lustre on any age or people—**John Milton**, who was the noblest and indomitable representative of the Puritan spirit to which he gave a most lofty and enduring expression.

MILTON

(1608—1674)

Milton, the greatest poet of the Puritan age, stands head and shoulders above all his contemporaries. Though he completely identified himself with Puritanism, he possessed such a strong personality that he cannot be taken to represent anyone but himself. Paying a tribute to the dominating personality of Milton, Wordsworth wrote the famous line :

Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart

Though Milton praised Spenser, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson as poets, he was different from them all. We do not find the exuberance of Spenser in his poetry. Unlike Shakespeare, Milton is

superbly egoistic. In his verse, which is harmonious and musical, we find no trace of the harshness of Ben Jonson. In all his poetry, Milton sings about himself and his own lofty soul. Being a deeply religious man and also endowed with artistic merit of a high order, he combined in himself the spirit of the Renaissance and the Reformation. In fact no other English poet was so profoundly religious and so much of an artist.

Milton was a great scholar of classical as well as Hebrew literature. He was also a child of the Renaissance, and great humanist. As an artist he may be called the last Elizabethan. From his young days he began to look upon poetry as a serious business of life; and he made up his mind to dedicate himself to it, and, in course of time, write a poem "which the world would not let die."

Milton's early poetry is lyrical. The important poems of the early period are : *The Hywn on the Nativity* (1629) ; *L' Allegro, Il Penseroso* (1632); *Comus* (1634) and; *Lycidas* (1637). The *Hymn* written when Milton was only twenty-one shows that his lyrical genius was already highly developed. The complementary poems *L' Allegero* and *Il Penseroso*, are full of very pleasing descriptions of rural scenes and recreations in Spring and Autumn. *L' Allegro* represents the poet in a gay and merry mood and it paints an idealised picture of rustic life from dawn to dusk. *Il Penseroso* is written in serious and meditative strain. In it the poet praises the passive joys of contemplative life. The poet extols the pensive thoughts of a recluse who spends his days contemplating the calmer beauties of nature. In these two poems, the lyrical genius of Milton is at its best.

Lycidas is a pastoral elegy, and it is the greatest of its type in the English language. It was written to mourn the death of Milton's friend, Edward King, but it also contains serious criticism of contemporary religion and politics.

Comus marks the development of Milton's mind from the merely pestoral and idyllic to the more serious and purposive tendency. The Puritanic element antagonistic to the prevailing looseness in religion and politics becomes more prominent. But in spite of its serious and didactic strain, it retains the lyrical tone which is so characteristic of Milton's early poetry.

Besides these poems, a few great sonnets such as *When the assault*

was intended to the city, also belongs to Milton's early period. Full of deeply-felt emotions, these sonnets are among the noblest in the English language, and they bridge the gulf between the lyrical tone of Milton's early poetry, and the deeply moral and didactic tone of his later poetry.

When the Civil War broke out in 1642, Milton threw himself heart and soul into the struggle against King Charles I. He devoted the best years of his life, when his poetical powers were at their peak, to this national movement. Finding himself unfit to fight as a soldier he became the Latin Secretary to Cromwell. This work he continued to do till 1649, when Charles I was defeated and Commonwealth was proclaimed under Cromwell. But when he returned to poetry to accomplish the ideal he had in his mind, Milton found himself completely blind. Moreover, after the death of Cromwell, and the coming of Charles II to the throne, Milton became friendless. His own wife and daughters turned against him. But undaunted by all these misfortunes, Milton girded up his loins and wrote his greatest poetical works—*Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes.*

The subject-matter of *Paradise Lost* consists of the casting out from Heaven of the fallen angels, their planning of revenge in Hell, Satan's flight, Man's temptation and fall from grace, and the promise of redemption. Against this vast background Milton projects his own philosophy of the purposes of human existence, and attempts "to justify the ways of God to men". On account of the richness and profusion of its imagery, descriptions of strange lands and seas, and the use of strange geographical names *Paradise Lost* is called the last great Elizabethan poem. But its perfectly organised design, its firm oulines and Latinised dictions make it essentially a product of the neo-classical or the Augustan period in English literature. In *Paradise Lost* the most prominent is the figure of Satan who possesses the qualities of Milton himself, and who represents indomitable heroism of the Puritans against Charles I:

What though the field be lost ?
All is not lost ; the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield
And what is else ; not to be overcome.

It is written in blank verse of the Elizabethan dramatists, but it is hardened and strengthened to suit the requirements of an epic poet.

Paradise Regained which deals with the subject of *Temptation in the Wilderness* is written, unlike *Paradise Lost*, in the form of discussion and not action. Not so sublime as *Paradise Lost*, it has a quieter atmosphere, but it does not betray a decline in poetic power. The mood of the poet has become different. The central figure is Christ, having the Puritanic, austere and stoic qualities rather than the tenderness which is generally associated with Him.

In *Samson Agonistes* Milton deals with an ancient Hebrew legend of Samson, the mighty champion of Israel, now blind and scorned, working as a slave among Philistines. This tragedy, which written on the Greek model, is charged with the tremendous personality of Milton himself, who in the character of the blind giant, Samson, surrounded by enemies, projects his own unfortunate experience in the reign of Charles II

Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves

The magnificent lyrics in this tragedy, which express the heroic faith of the long-suffering Puritans, represent the summit of technical excellence achieved by Milton.

After a certain initial neglect, due largely to political reasons, Milton soon came to be regarded as one of the greatest of English poets, and *Paradise Lost* made its way rapidly to the head of English poetry. The classical critics praised this poem mainly because it was conceived on the lines of the classical epic. They compared it with Homer and Virgil, and often favourably. For example Dryden wrote in his *A Discourse Concerning the Origin and Progress of Satire* (1693) :

"As for Milton, whom we all admire with so much justice, his thoughts are elevated, his words sounding, and no man has so happily copied the manner of Homer, or so copiously translated his Grecisms, and the Latin elegancies of Virgil."

In *Preface to Fables* (1700) Dryden wrote: "Milton was the poetical son of Spenser.........; for we have our lineal descents as well as other families. Spenser more than once insinuates, that the soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body; and that was begotten by him two hundred years after his decease. Milton has acknowledged to me, that Spenser was his original."

Addison in the *Spectator* (1712) wrote in praise of Milton and *Paradise Lost* : "Milton's characters, most of them, lie out of nature,

and were to be formed purely by his own invention. It shows greater genius in Shakespeare to have drawn his Caliban, than his Hotspur or Julius Caesar : the one was to be supplied out of his own imagination, whereas the other might have been formed upon tradition, history and observation. It was much easier, therefore, for Homer to find proper sentiments for an assembly of Grecian generals, than for Milton to diversify his infernal council with proper characters, and inspire them with a variety of sentiments.........Adam and Eve, before the fall, are a different species from that of mankind who are descended from them; and none but a poet of the most unbounded invention, and the most exquisite judgment, could have filled their conversation and behaviour with so many circumstances during their state of innocence.

"Nor is it sufficient for an epic poem to be filled with such thoughts as are natural, unless it abounds also with such as are sublime.......

"Milton's chief talent, and, indeed, his distinguishing excellence, lies in the sublimity of his thoughts. There are others of the moderns who rival him in every other part of poetry ; but in the greatness of his sentiments he triumphs over all the poets both modern and ancient. Homer only excepted, the metaphors are very bold, but just; I must, however, observe, that the metaphors are not too thick-sown in Milton, which always savours too much of wit; that they never clash with one another; which, as Aristotle observes, turns a sentence into a kind of enigma or riddle; and that he seldom has recourse to them where the proper and natural words will do as well.

"Milton, by the above mentioned helps, and by the choice of the noblest words and phrases which our tongue would afford him, has carried our language to a greater height than any of the English poets have ever done before or after him, and made the sublimity of his style equal to that of his sentiments.

"There is another objection against Milton's fable......that the hero in *Paradise Lost* is unsuccessful, and by no means a match for his enemies. This gave occasion to Mr. Dryden's reflection, that the devil was in reality Milton's hero. I think I have obviated this objection in my first paper. The *Paradise Lost* is an epic, or a narrative poem, and he that looks for an hero in it, searches for that which Milton never intended; but if we will needs fix the name of an hero upon any person in it, it is certainly the Messiah (Christ), who is the hero, both in the principal action, and in the chief episodes.

"I must in the next place observe, that Milton has interwoven in the texture of his fable some particulars which do not seem to have probability enough for an epic poem, particularly in the actions which he ascribes to Sin and Death, and the picture which he draws of the Limbo of Vanity, with other passages in the second book. Such allegories rather savour of the spirit of Spenser and Ariosto, than of Homer and Virgil.

"In the structure of his poem, he has likewise admitted of too many digressions, though I must confess there is so great a beauty in these very digressions, that I would not wish them out of the poem.......

"If we consider the language of this great poet, we must allow that it is often too much laboured, and sometimes obscured by old words, transpositions, and foreign idioms......Milton's sentiments and ideas are so wonderfully sublime, that it would have been impossible for him to have represented them in their full strength and beauty, without having recourse to these foreign assistances. Our language sunk under him, and was unequal to that greatness of soul which furnished him with such glorious conceptions.

"I have now finished my observations on a work which does an honour to the English nation."

Dr. Johnson, referring to the sublimity and loftiness of *Paradise Lost*, wrote in *Life of Milton* (1779) : "The characteristic quality of *Paradise Lost* is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural part is gigantic loftiness. He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish.

"He seems to have been well acquainted with his own genius, and to know what it was that Nature had bestowed upon him more bountifully than upon others ; the power of displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful; he therefore chose a subject on which too much could not be said, on which he might tire his fancy without the censure of extravagance.

"The appearances of nature and the occurrences of life did not satiate his appetite of greatness. To paint things as they are requires a minute attention, and employ the memory rather than the fancy. Milton's delight was to sport in the wide region of possibility; reality was a scene too narrow for his mind. He sent his faculties upon

discovery, into worlds where only imagination can travel, and delighted to form new modes of existence, and furnish sentiment and action to superior beings, to trace the counsels of hell, or accompany the choirs of heaven.

"In Milton every line breathes sanctity of thought and purity of manners, except when the train of narration requires the introduction of the rebellious spirits; and even they are compelled to acknowledge their subjection to God in such a manner as excites reverence and confirms piety."

The Romantics accepted the greatness of Milton, but they liked him mainly for his style and diction. In his *Lectures* (1818) Coleridge observed :

"The age in which the foundations of Milton's mind were laid, was congenial to it as one great era of profound erudition and individual genius—that in which the superstructure was carried up was no less favourable to it by the sternness of discipline and a show of self-control, highly flattering to the imaginative dignity of an heir of fame, and which won Milton over from the dear-loved delights of academic groves and cathedral aisles to the anti-prelatic (anti-Catholic) party. It acted on him, too, no doubt, and modified his studies by a characteristic controversial spirit (his presentation of God is tinted with it)—a spirit no less busy indeed in political than in theological and ecclesiastical dispute, but carrying of the former almost always, more or less, in the guise of the latter. And so far as Pope's censure of our poet—that he makes God the Father a school divine—is just, we must attribute it to the character of his age.

"Such was the soil, which constituted, in the strict sense of the word, the circumstances of Milton's mind. In his mind itself there were purity and piety absolute ; an imagination to which neither the past nor the present were interesting except as far as they called forth and enlivened the great ideal, in which and for which he lived ; a keen love of truth, which, after many weary pursuits, found a harbour in a sublime listening to the still voice in his own spirit, and as keen a love of his country, which, after a disappointment still more depressive, expanded and soared into a love of man as a probationer of immortality. These were, these alone could be, the conditions under which such a work as the *Paradise Lost* could be conceived and accomplished.

"The character of Satan is pride and sensual indulgence, finding in self the sole motive of action. It is the character so often seen

in little on the political stage. It exhibits all the restlessness, temerity and cunning which have marked the mighty hunters of mankind from Nimrod to Napoleon. The common fascination of men is, that these great men, as they are called, must act from some great motive. Milton has carefully marked in his Satan the intense selfishness, the alcohol of egotism, which would rather reign in hell rather serve in heaven. To place his lust of self in opposition to denial of self or duty, and to show what exertion it would make, and what pains endure to accomplish its end, is Milton's particular object in the character of Satan. But around this character he has thrown a singularity of daring, a grandeur of sufferance, and a ruined splendour; which constitute the very height of poetic sublimity.

Lastly, as to execution, the language and versification of *Paradise Lost* are peculiar in being so much more necessarily correspondent to each than those in any other poem or poet. The connection of the sentences and the position of the words are exquisitely artificial; but the position is rather according to the logic of passion or universal logic, than to the logic of grammar. Milton attempted to make the English language obey the logic of passion as perfectly as the Greek and Latin. Hence the occasional harshness in the construction.

"Sublimity is the pre-eminent characteristic of the *Paradise Lost.* It is not an arithmetical sublime like Klopstock's, whose rule always is to treat what we might think large as contemptibly small. Klopstock mistakes bigness for greatness. There is a greatness arising from images of effort and daring, and also from those of moral endurance; in Milton both are united. The fallen angels are human passions, invested with a dramatic reality.

"In the descriptions of Paradise itself you have Milton's sunny side as a man; here his descriptive powers are exercised to the utmost, and he draws deep upon his Italian sources. In the descriptions of Eve, and throughout this part of the poem, the poet is predominant over the theologian. Dress is the symbol of the Fall, but the mark of intellect; and the metaphysics of the dress are, the hiding what is not symbolic and displaying by discrimination what is. The love of Adam and Eve in Paradise is of the highest merit—not phantomatic, and yet removed from everything degrading. It is the sentiment of one rational being towards another made tender by a specific difference in that which is essentially the same in both; it is a union of opposites, to giving and receiving mutually of the permanent in either, a completion of each in the other.

"Milton is not a picturesque, but a musical poet ; although he has this merit that the object chosen by him by any particular foreground always remains prominent to the end, enriched, but not incumbered, by the opulence of descriptive details furnished by an exhaustless imagination. I wish the *Paradise Lost* were more carefully read and studied than I can see any ground for believing it is, especially those parts which form the habit of always looking for a story in poetry, are scarcely read at all—as for example, Adam's vision of future events in the 11th and 12th books. No one can rise from the perusal of this immortal poem without a deep sense of the grandeur and purity of Milton's soul, or without feeling how susceptible of domestic enjoyment he really was, notwithstanding the discomforts which actually resulted from an apparently unhappy choice in marriage. He was, as every truly great poet has ever been, a good man ; but finding it impossible to realise his own aspirations, either in religion, or politics, or society, he gave up his heart to the living spirit and light within him, and avenged himself on the world by enriching it with this record of his own transcendent ideal."

Hazlitt in his *On Shakespeare and Milton* (1818) observed : "Milton did not write from casual impulse, but after a sever examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to leave nothing undone which it was in his power to do. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost : he surrounds it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. He refines on his description of beauty ; loading sweets on sweets, till the sense aches at them ; and raises his images of terror to a gigantic elevation. In Milton, there is always an appearance of effort ; in Shakespeare, scarcely any.

"Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or profane ; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer. The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials. In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of the mighty intellect, that the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them. The quantity of art in him shows the strength of his genius ; the weight of intellectual obligations would have oppressed any other writer. Milton's learning has the effect of intuition.

He describes objects of which he could only have read in books, with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature. He makes words tell us pictures .....

"Force of style is one of Milton's greatest excellences. Hence perhaps, he stimulates us more in the reading, and less afterwards. The way to defend Milton against all impugners (opponents), is to take down the book and read it. Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakespeare's) that deserves the name of verse.

The Victorian critics continued to admire Milton. In his *Essay on Milton,* (1825) Macaulay wrote :

"It is by his poetry that Milton is best known ; and it is of his poetry that we wish first to speak. By the general suffrage of the civilised world, his place has been assigned among the greatest masters of the art.

"The most striking characteristic of the poetry of Milton is the extreme remoteness of the associations by means of which it acts on the reader. Its effect is produced, not so much by the ideas which it directly conveys, as by other ideas which are connected with them. He electrifies the mind through conductors. The most unimaginative man must understand the *Iliad.* Homer gives him no choice, and requires from him no exertion, but takes the whole upon himself, and sets the images in so clear a light, that it is impossible to be blind to them. The works of Milton cannot be comprehended or enjoyed, unless the mind of the reader co-operates with that of the writer. He does not paint a finished picture, or play for a mere passive listener. He sketches, and leaves others to fill up the outline. He strikes a key-note, and expects his hearer to make out the melody.

"We often hear of the magical influence of poetry. The expression in general means nothing ; but, applied to Milton, it is most appropriate. His poetry acts like an incantation. Its merit lies less in its obvious meaning than in its occult power. There would seem, at first sight, to be no more in his words than in other words. But they are words of enchantment. No sooner are they pronounced than the past is present and the distant near. New forms of beauty start at once into existence, and all the burial-places of the memory give up their dead. Change the structure of the sentences ; substitute one synonym for another, and the whole effect is destroyed. The spell

loses its power ; and he who should then hope to conjure with it would find himself as much mistaken as Cassim in the Arabian tale, when he stood crying. 'Open Wheat', 'Open Barley', to the door which obeyed no sound but 'open Sesame'. The miserable failure of Dryden in his attempt to translate into his own diction some parts of the *Paradise Lost*, is a remarkable instance of this.

"In support of these observations we may remark, that scarcely any passage in the poems of Milton are more generally known or frequently repeated than those which are little more than master-rolls of names. They are not always more appropriate or more melodious than other names. But they are charmed names. Every one of them is the first link in a long chain of associated ideas. Like the dwelling-place of our infancy revisited in manhood, like the song of our country heard in a strange land, they produce upon us an effect wholly independent of their intrinsic value. One transports us back to a remote period of history. Another places us among the novel scenes and manners of a distant region. A third evokes all the dear classical recollections of childhood, the school-room, the dog-eared Virgil, the holiday, and the prize. A fourth brings before us the splendid phantoms of chivalric romance, the trophied lists, the embroidered housings, the quaint devices, the haunted forests, the enchanted gardens, the achievements of enamoured knights, and the smiles of rescued princesses.

"Poetry which relates to the beings of another world ought to be at once mysterious and picturesque. That of Milton is so.

"The spirits of Milton are unlike those of almost all other writers ; his friends, in particular, are wonderful creations. They are not metaphysical abstractions. They are not wicked men. They are not ugly beasts. They have no horns, no tails...... They have just enough in common with human nature to be intelligible to human beings."

Matthew Arnold, in his essay on *Milton* (1888), referring to his grand style, observed:

"If to our English race an adequate sense of perfection of work is a real danger, if the discipline of respect for a high and flawless excellence is peculiarly needed by us, Milton is of all our gifted men the best lesson, the most salutary influence. In the sure and flawless perfection of his rhythm and diction, he is as admirable as Virgil or Dante, and in this respect he is unique amongst us. No one else in English literature and art possesses the like distinction.

"That Milton, of all our English race, is by his diction and rhythm the one artist of the highest rank in the great style whom we have ; this I take as requiring no discussion, this I take as certain.

"The mighty power of poetry and art is generally admitted. But where the soul of this power, of this power at its best, chiefly resides, very many of us fail to see. It resides chiefly in the refining and elevation wrought in us by the high and rare excellence of the great style. We may feel the effect without being able to give ourselves clear account of its cause, but the thing is so. Now, no race needs the influence mentioned, the influence of refining and elevation, more than ours ; and in poetry and art our grand source of them is Milton.

"To what does he owe this supreme distinction ? To nature first and foremost, to that bent of nature for inequality which to the worshippers of the average man is so unacceptable ; to a gift, a divine favour. 'The older one grows', says Goethe, 'the more one prizes natural gifts, because by no possibility can they be procured and stuck on.' Nature formed Milton to be a great poet. But what other poet has shown so sincere a sense of the grandeur of his vocation, and a moral effort so constant and sublime to make and keep himself worthy of it ? The Milton of religious and political controversy, and perhaps of dometic life also, is not seldom disfigured by want of amenity, by acerbity. The Milton of poetry, on the other hand, is one of those great men 'who were modest'—to quote a fine remark of Leopardi—'who are modest, because they continually compare themselves, not with other men, but with that idea of the perfect which they have before their mind.' The Milton of poetry is the man, in his own magnificent phrase, of 'devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit that can enrich all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases.' And finally, the Milton of poetry is, in his own words again, a man of 'industrious and select reading'. Continually he lived in companionship with high and rare excellence, with the great Hebrew poets and prophets, with the great poets of Greece and Rome. The Hebrew compositions were not in verse, and can be not inadequately represented by the grand, measured prose of our English Bible. The verse of the poets of Greece and Rome no translation can adequately reproduce. Prose cannot have the power of verse ; verse-translation may give whatever of charm is in the soul and talent of the translator

himself, but never the specific charm of the verse and poet translated. In our race are thousands of readers, presently there will be millions, who know not a word of Greek and Latin, and will never learn those languages. If this host of readers are ever to gain any sense of the power and charm of the great poets of antiquity, their way to gain it is not through translations of the ancients, but through the original poetry of Milton, who has the like power and charm, because he has the like great style.

"Through Milton they may gain it, for, in conclusion, Milton is English ; this master in the great style of the ancients is English—Milton has made the great style no longer an exotic here, he has made it an inmate amongst us, a leaven, and a power."

In the modern times the raputation of Milton has sunk a little. He has, to a certain extent, lost his popularity with the modern reader because he is not born and bred in the classical atmosphere, and Milton's religious doctrine is not merely foreign to him, but even repugnant. Among the modern critics, T. S. Eliot is the first who has dared to treat Milton and his poetry in a rather flippant manner. In his *A Note on the Verse of John Milton* (1936) he observed :

"While it must be admitted that Milton is a very great poet indeed, it is something of a puzzle to decide in what greatness consists. On analysis, the marks against him appear both more numerous and more significant than the marks to his credit. As a man, he is antipathetic. Either from the moralist's point of view, or from the theologian's point of view, or from the psychologist's point of view, or from that of the political philosopher, or judging by the ordinary standards of likeableness in human beings, Milton is unsatisfactory. The doubts which I have to express about him are more serious than these. His greatness as a poet has been sufficiently celebrated, though I think largely for the wrong reasons, and without the proper reservations. What seems to me necessary is to assert at the same time his greatness—in what he could do well he did better than any one else has ever done it—and the serious charges to be made against him, in respect of the deterioration—the peculiar type of deterioration—to which he subjected the language......

"The most important fact about Milton, for my purposes, is his blindness. I do not mean that to go blind in middle life is itself enough to determine the whole nature of a man's poetry. Blindness must be considered in conjunction with Milton's personality and

character, and the peculiar education which he received. It must also be considered in connection with his devotion to, and expertness in, the art of music. Had Milton been a man of very keen senses—I mean of all the five senses, his blindness would not have mattered so much. But for a man whose consciousness, such as it was, had been withered early by book-learning, and whose gifts were naturally aural, it mattered a great deal. It would seem, indeed, to have helped him to concentrate on what he could do best.

"At no period is the visual imagination conspicuous in Milton's poetry. It would be as well to give a few illustrations of what I mean by visual imagination. From *Macbeth* :

> This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
> By this loved mansionry that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here ; no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, not coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle ;
> Where he most breed and haunt, I have observed
> The air is delicate.

It may be observed that such an image, as well as another familiar quotation from a little later in the same play

> Light thickens, and the crow
> Makes wing to the rooky wood.

not only offer something to the eye, but, so to speak, to the common sense. I mean that they convey the feeling of being in a particular place at a particular time. The comparison with Shakespeare offers another indication of the peculiarity of Milton. With Shakespeare, far more than with any other poet in English, the combinations of words offer perpetual novelty ; they enlarge the meaning of the individual words indeed : thus 'procreant cradles', 'rooky wood.' In comparison, Milton's images do not give this sense of particularity, nor are the separate words developed in significance. His language is, if one may use the term without disparagement, *artificial* and *conventional*......

"A disadvantage of the rhetorical style appears to be, that a dislocation takes place, through the hepertrophy of the auditory imagination at the expense of the visual and tactile, so that the inner meaning is separated from the surface, and tends to become something occult, or at least without effect upon the reader until fully

understood. To extract everything possible from *Paradise Lost*, it would seem necessary to read it in two different ways, first solely for the sound, and second for the sense. The full beauty of his long periods can hardly be enjoyed while we are wrestling with the meaning as well; and for the pleasure of the ear the meaning is hardly necessary, except in so far as certain key-words indicate the emotional tone of the passage. Now Shakespeare, or Dante, will bear innumerable readings, but at each reading all the elements of appreciation can be present. There is no interruption between the surface that these poets present to you and the core......There seems to be a division, in Milton, between the philosopher or theologian and the poet......"

Now let us take up some of the important characteristics of Milton as a poet :

1. **The Puritanical Element in Milton's Poetry.** Milton was a Puritan and an active member of the Puritan party, who spent the best years of his life in upholding and defending the Puritan ideals. During the reigns of James I and Charles I the Puritans had come into open conflict with the ruling party, and organised themselves into a political party. So at a critical time when the civil and religious liberty of the English people was jeopardised, Puritan party emerged as the upholder of the English Constitution and defender of the rights of the people. It was this party which fought successfully the Civil War against Charles I, and which was sternly persecuted at the Restoration. Like most of the Puritans, Milton was God-fearing, high-principled, courageous, earnest, possessing strength, uprightness and integrity. Being a great moralist he was ready to sacrifice every practical or sentimental consideration to a high ideal of purity and truth, in private and public life.

In Milton's poetry this moral ardour is present from the very beginning, but in *Paradise Lost* it comes to the forefront. It was Milton, the Puritan poet, living in a puritanical environment, who selected the Fall of Man as the theme of his great epic, because in the treatment of the Fall he meant to condemn the mental levity of Man, who is prone to forget the importance of his very actions. Adam and Eve in a non-serious manner commit what they imagine is a trifling error, for which they are punished with a doom out of all proportion to their crime. Milton's treatment of the Fall yields the obvious meaning that it is the first business of man to understand the issues of life, and to be aware of the importance of every trivial act.

This he believed because not only his own nature but the trend of Puritan thought fostered this awareness. Milton's principal concern was the present life, and the right use of every moment of it.

Milton's conception of the poetic art was to a very great extent coloured by his Puritanic outlook. It was in 1642 that he wrote :—

"Poetical powers are the inspired gift of God rarely bestowed ......in every nation, and are of power, besides the office of a pulpit to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbation of the mind and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works, and he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church; to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship."

Twenty years after when Milton set down to compose *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained,* he realised his own ideas. Here he regarded himself not as an author but as a medium, the mouthpiece of "that eternal spirit who can enrich with all utterance and all knowledge." Urania, heavenly Muse, visits him nightly

And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires,
Easy my unpremeditated verse

(P.L. IX. 24—25)

Urania bestows the following words and musical sweetness; to God's spirit he looks to

Shine inward, and the mind through all her power
Iradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal right.

(P.L. III. 50—53)

The poets with whom he aspires to equal himself are not Dante, or Tasso, or Spenser, but

Blind Thymyris, and blind Maeonides,
And Tiresuas and Phineus, and prophets old.

It is God's truth which passes his lips—lips hallowed by the touch of sacred fire. He is the passive instrument through whom flows the emanation from on high; his words are not his own, but a suggestion.

Milton also shares the cynicism of the Puritans who did not have much regard for the ordinary people. To him the people are—

> But a herd confus'd
> A miscellaneous rabble, who extol
> Things vulgar.
>
> (P.R. III. 49—51)

That is why he wrote for the audience 'fit though few'.

But there was another aspect of the Puritanic temper and character which Milton did not share at all. On account of their too much preoccupation with the most narrowly religious aspect of man's conduct, aims, and destiny, the Puritans repudiated the claims of art, science, human culture, and whatever else helps to beautify, uplift and give value to secular life. Milton's Puritanism was of broader type. Coming under the influence of the Renaissance he was a great devotee of art and loved all that is beautiful and pure. So it is wrong to describe Milton as "not only the highest but the completest type of Puritanism." We must not lose sight of the fact that "the greatest of England's Puritans was also the greatest of her artists", and he could not have attained high excellence as a poet if he had remained under the complete dominion of the strict spirit of Puritanism.

2. **The Renaissance Element in Milton's Poetry.** Milton was a staunch Puritan and he devoted the best years of his life for the cause of Puritanism, but the influence of the Renaissance on him was also great. In his early poetry this influence was completely in the ascendant. The Hellenic (Greek) or the Renaissance element is paramount in the two early poems—**L' Allegro,** and **Il Penseroso.** In **L' Allegro** there are echoes of romance, the dancing and rustic sports, the visits to the playhouse and the references to Shakespeare and to Ben Jonson. In **Il Penseroso** the poet dwells upon his love of pagan learning, and in imagination he haunts the Cathedral, and enjoys the beauty of its dim aisles, and the sounds of the organ. His next important literary production, **Comus,** which has a serious moral and religious purpose, has literary affiliations with the Renaissance, as it belongs to the dramatic tradition of Peele, Fletcher, and Jonson, whom Milton had carefully and lovingly studied. In form and method **Lycidas** is directly connected with the Renaissance and its classicism. It is written in the form of pastoral elegy which had its origin in Greek literature, and which passed into European literature at the time of the Renaissance .

Though when Milton set himself to the writing of **Paradise Lost**, the Puritanic element in him had become the dominating factor, yet the Renaissance element was not completely abandoned. Here he employed the art and learning of the Renaissance in the service of those religious and moral truths which had now become the dominating factors in his life. **Paradise Lost** is written in the form of a classical epic. In fact a careful examination of the poem reveals the fact that not merely in point of art, but also in thoughts, it shows distinct traces of the influence of the Renaissance.

One of the essential characteristics of the Renaissance was its humanism, which in England was the basis of the works of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Bacon. It asserted the essential dignity of man, and proposed to achieve its goal through the study not of God, but of man. It also trusted the human reason as well as intuition and revealed truth as the instrument of knowledge. It turned, therefore, to Scriptures for the best record of man's nature in its relation to God, of righteousness and love, and then to the classical literature, where it found a wider revelation of man as an individual and a citizen, this latter source constituting no denial but a completion of the data afforded by the former.

Now Milton shows himself a humanist in both his method and aim. He is convinced of God, of the fact of evil, of the inevitableness of retribution, and of the hope of heaven. These postulates are the postulates not of Puritanism alone but of the total humanism of the Renaissance. They are absolutely vital to Milton's thought. But the real system which Milton erects in **Paradise Lost** is not the allegory but an interpretation of experience, based on the bedrock of human freedom. Milton affirms that the account of the battle in Heaven is merely a way of representing spiritual truth to human understanding. And as to the actual experience of Adam and Eve, not to mention the desperate plot of evil men in Hell to overthrow the reign of righteousness and law, they are richer in human truth than anything in English imaginative literature outside Shakespeare. Moreover, Milton has been able to give them wide and permanent significance by virtue of a lifetime spent in the study of man's nature in its relation to moral and spiritual forces by which his destiny is shaped. In this respect, **Paradise Lost** is primarily the epic of man's moral struggle, the record of his first defeat and the promise of his ultimate victory.

In **Paradise Lost** Milton has in fact fought for the individual-

ism which he had inherited from the Renaissance, and without which life was not worthwhile. A life in which man was not responsible for his own actions was meaningless. In this poem he has shown that God in His omniscience has foreknowledge of man's fate but he leaves his will free. No one has been pre-elected to salvation or damnation. All have the chance of salvation, but certain men have been singled out for special eminence, good or bad. This independence of the individual is not only shown in Adam, but also in Satan, whose unbending resolution is here exhibited in its most magnificent and ideal form. Self-exaltation is the motive of all Satan's conduct. Even in defeat he will never dream of submission :

What though the field be lost ?
All is not lost......the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate
And courage never to submit or yield ;
And what is else, not to be overcome.

(P.L. I. 105—109)

Milton conceived and partly executed **Paradise Lost** at a time when the forces of the Renaissance had not lost their potency and when the synthesis of the two great movements of the age—Renaissance and Reformation—was still possible. Milton's true kinship is not with Bunyan and other strictly Puritan writers, but with the ancient classical poets, and his immediate Elizabethan predecessors—Shakespeare and Spenser—whose spiritual aspirations were united with the human passion for truth and beauty, and who trusted the imagination as an important medium for the attainment of their ideal. Milton's was a large nature which demanded a free expansion of life. That is why he is a near kin to Shakespeare than to Pope. Like the great Elizabethan writers he succeeded in combining a passionate love of beauty with religious fervour and a strenuous moral idealism; and he was the last poet in England to achieve this, as after him the gulf between the two movements became too wide to be bridged again. His **Paradise Lost**, though written with the express purpose of "justifying the ways of God to man", is the great surviving monument of the immense of mass of Renaissance writing dealing with Biblical material. On account of the constant presence of the Renaissance element in Milton's poetry, it is no exaggeration to call Milton "the last Elizabethan" or "the poetical son of Spenser".

3. **Milton's Philosophy.** Milton is a daring thinker, and his thought is essentially original. Though his main philosophy

of life is based on his deep-seated religious beliefs, yet at bottom he is a clear rationalist, who despises superstitions when they correspond to no clear idea of his own. Milton's personal experience worked upon his religious conceptions, and the philosophic working of his mind moulded them into harmony with his character. The essential principle of Milton's ethics can be found in **Lycidas** where he says :

To triumph in victorious dance,
O'er sensual Folly, and Intemperance.

The lesson of **Comus** is the triumph of reason over passion, the inner freedom of man secured by virtue :—

Love Virtue, she alone is free.

In **Comus** and later in **Paradise Lost** Milton shows that the chief passion to be conquered by man is sensuality. Milton chose this theme because it corresponds to one of his deepest needs. Milton felt that passion is as important as reason, but both must be kept in harmony. In **Paradise Lost** Satan is the great champion of passion in revolt against divine reason. He represents all that Milton hates—tyrants, kings, popes and even priests. He is the evil element in every man that is to be severely resisted. Reason is represented by Christ who is the only reasonable part in each believer. In this way **Paradise Lost** is the struggle of passion against reason.

Milton believes in the natural nobility and dignity of man. All the strength of his conscious, traditional humanism comes out in his first description of the human pair :—

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
God-like erect, with native Honour clad,
In naked Majestic seem'd, Lords of all,
And worthie seemed, for in their looks Divine
The image of their glorious maker shon,
Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,
Severe, but in true filial freedom plac'd :
Whence true authoritie in men.

(P. L. IV. 288—295)

And again in his description of Adam going to meet Raphael :—

Meanwhile our Primitive great Sire, to meet
His god-like Guest, walks forth, without more train
Accompani'd then with his own compleat
Perfections, in himself was all his state,
More solemn than the tedious pomp that waits
On Princes.

Man is noble by nature, owing obedience to God ; but he has a free will, and hence free to choose, and capable of action, morally good or bad, for which he alone is responsible. Milton believes that man brings about his fall by his own actions, for which he himself is responsible because he has the power to choose. Not knowing himself properly, he allows his passions to deceive and get the better of his judgment. Once the passions have got the upper hand, chaos follows, all peace of mind is gone, and man falls from true liberty to mental anarchy.

Milton adheres to the orthodox idea of guilt and redemption. After the redemption of man is brought about by Christ, the regenerate man after his reason illumined by Christ, will rise to a more excellent state than that from which he has fallen. Thus in the end, Satan's schemes turn to good, and Adam, though himself sinning, did an ultimately useful act. The new earth revealed to Adam by Michael near the end of the poem will be a far better place to live, than the original Eden, as Adam exclaims :—

> O goodness infinite, goodness immense ;
> That all this good of evil shall produce,
> An evil turn to good ; more wonderful
> Than that by which creation first brought forth,
> Light out of darkness, full of doubt I stand.
> Whether I should repent me now of sin
> By me done and occasioned, or rejoice
> Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring.

Though Milton's hopes of the future of mankind were shattered during the writing of the poem, on account of the Restoration of Charles II to the throne of England, yet he did not lose faith in God and himself. He found that the 'Paradise within' is the substitute for the paradise on earth. The saving thing about life is that such a paradise is within the reach of human beings, and their destiny is in their own power. It was this philosophy of Milton, which gave him sufficient courage to reconcile him to life that had fallen so far short of his expectations, and by which he had been more disappointed than most people.

Milton has been considered by certain critics as a strict theologian who set down in poetry severe Puritan dogmas which are disagreeable to their philosophic conceptions. Others do not give him any credit as a thinker. For example, Raleigh considers **Paradise Lost** neither more nor less than "an imposing monument to dead ideas", and this seems to be the final estimate of the modern readers.

But it is wrong to consider Milton's philosophy as obsolete, outdated, based on severe theology, and having no validity for modern times. Milton, as a thinker, brought about harmony of the great ideals of the Renaissance—beauty, righteousness and truth—and his philosophy has, no doubt, validity for all times. This view is supported by Saurat who says : "Even to-day man can use Milton's forms and moulds of thought, pour his mind into them, and obtain results. For Milton has not only constructed a cosmology, he has reached deeper ; he has looked for ultimate reality within the heart of man, and placed the laws of destiny in man's soul and will."

4. **Milton as an Artist.** Milton is a perfect artist in his versification, diction, and the use of images and similes. He has shown courage and originality in the choice of blank verse for the writing of **Paradise Lost.** Though now blank verse seems the natural metre for a long, serious poem, it was not so in Milton's time. No one had ever thought before Milton that blank verse was the best measure for narrative poetry dealing with lofty themes in the year of the publication of **Paradise Lost.** Dryden delivered his judgment that the rhymed couplet was best suited for tragic passages in the drama and that blank verse should be chiefly employed for lighter and more colloquial purposes of comedy. It was on being provoked by his judgment that Milton added a few sentences in his preface regarding the metre used in the poem. There he says, "The measure is English heroic verse without rhyme", and in his closing words he takes credit to himself for his example set "the first in English of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage to rhyming." So, as in point of matter, in form also, Milton was original, for there was no precedent which he could follow, or which could serve as a warning. Thus he had to handle blank verse by his own ingenuity and at his own peril. In the words of Raleigh, "He left a high road behind him along which many a tuneful pauper has since limped, but before him he found nothing but jingle and false fires."

Milton, as his prefatory note to **Paradise Lost** shows, had evidently formed his blank verse style on a careful study of the Elizabethan dramatists. But as his poem is epic, not dramatic, the measure in his hands necessarily becomes more artificial than it is to be found in any drama. His object, as he says, was to compose periods with the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another not in "the jingling sound of like endings." For this purpose

he united all the artifices found in the usage of his predecessors. His sentences are often as long as Marlowe's ; for example, the opening sentence of **Paradise Lost**, which extends over sixteen lines. But these sentences are broken by endless variety of sections and pauses, so that each verse contains not only the essential rhythmical pause, but also the grammatical one. The total result is that in the absence of rhyme, the sense of rhythm is made to depend increasingly upon the sense ; or to use the phrase of Bridges, "the stress declares its supremacy."

Milton's verse has got the architectonic quality, for which it is highly praised. The individual lines do not stand disjointed, but they are all combined in order to produce a harmonious pattern. Milton's verse does not yield up its secret to examination of a single line because it is not formed in this way. It is the period, the sentence, and still more the paragraph, that is the unit of Milton's verse. The most conclusive evidence of Milton's supremacy as a metrist lies in his ability to give a perfect and unique pattern to every paragraph, so that the full beauty of the line is found in the context.

The music of Milton's verse is superb. Most of the critics have insisted that the sonorous music is the most pleasing quality of Milton's verse, and some have openly declared that the meaning of **Paradise Lost** is entirely irrelevant and unessential when its music is so enchanting. Well read, the music of his verse is exceedingly delicate and noble. In the opinion of Hazlitt, "Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakespeare's), that deserves the name of verse". Refuting the charge of Dr. Johnson, who had modelled his ideas of versification on the regular sing-song of Pope, that **Paradise Lost** was "harsh and unequal," Hazlitt observed :

"The sound of Milton's lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image. They rise and fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick of affectation, as the occasion seems to acquire."

How carefully and incessantly Milton adjusted the sound to the sense is familiar to every reader of **Paradise Lost**. Even the dullest ear catches the contrast between the opening of the gates of Heaven :

Heaven opened wide
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound
On golden hinges moving——

and the opening of the gates of hell :—

> On a sudden open fly,
> With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,
> The infernal doors, and on their hinges greet
> Harsh thunder, that the lowest bottom shook of Erebus.

Many poets have paid high tributes to the mighty harmonies of Milton's verse. Arnold finds in it the "sure and flawless perfection of rhythm and diction." Landor confessed, "My ear is dissatisfied with everything for days together, after the harmony of **Paradise Lost**. I recur to it incessantly as the noblest specimen in the world of eloquence, harmony and genius." And the highest tribute came from Tennyson, himself one of the greatest masters of harmony in the English language, who wrote in his sonnet, entitled "Milton" :—

> O mighty-mouth'd inventor of harmonies,
> O skill'd to sing of Time and Eternity,
> God-gifted organ—voice of England,
> Milton, a name to resound for ages.

(*b*) **Milton's Diction.** Milton's diction (choice and use of words in poetry) is considered to be "eminently artificial." Addison remarked, "Milton's language is English, but it is Milton's English. In fact it is Latin English or Greek English. Not only the words, phraseology, the transposition, but the ancient idiom is seen in all he writes so that a learned foreigner of his days could think Milton the easiest to be understood of all English writers." Milton's ambition was to enrich his native tongue, and this characteristic is most conspicuously seen in **Paradise Lost.**

Though Milton laid the foundation of his style in the thoroughly English idiom he had studied from his close study of the Elizabathan dramatists, yet in the writing of **Paradise Lost**, Virgil's epic was the model which he always kept in view, and the rhythms of Virgil and the phrases of Cicero were ever in his memory. The nature of his subject, its supernatural character, obliged him to exalt his narrative beyond common usage by unfamiliar modes of diction. In fact, he raised it, by various devices, above the level of ordinary speech. It was essential because in **Paradise Lost** Milton does not appear as a private person, but as a priest, and he summons his reader not to hear what one particular man thought or felt about the Fall, but also to take part under his leadership, in the great universal drama which directly concerns each one of them. He

makes his epic a ceremony so that the readers may share it, and the more ceremonial it becomes, the more they are elevated to the rank of participants.

Commenting on Milton's diction, Dr. Johnson remarked, "Through all his greater works there prevails a uniform peculiarity of diction, a mode and cast of expression which bears little resemblance to that of any former writer, and which is far removed from common use, that an unlearned reader, when he first opens his book, finds himself surprised by a new language."

Milton has been blamed by many critics for "corrupting the English language." Addison said of him, "Our language sunk under him." Dr. Johnson condemned Milton for "he formed his style by perverse and pedantic principles." Keats, though a great admirer of Milton's poetry, wrote of him, "I shall never become attached to a foreign idiom so as to put it into my writings. The **Paradise Lost,** though so fine in itself, is a corruption of our language—it should be kept as it is unique—a curiosity—a beautiful and grand curiosity, the most remarkable production in the world. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton." T.S. Eliot blames Milton's eccentric diction for having a harmful effect on the poets who followed him, and especially on the eighteenth century poetic diction.

The fact is that Milton's style is unique, and it is peculiar to his genius. It is a singularly personal style and there lies its peculiar greatness. In violating the English language he imitated nobody, and he is inimitable. If some of the later poets came under his dominating influence and made a mess of their language, Milton is not to be blamed for it, and this fact does not in any way diminish greatness of his style.

(*c*) **Milton's Imagery and His Use of Similes.** Milton's imagination embraces the whole universe. Having the axis of his faith rested on God and the soul of man, he accepts, without misgiving, the universe as his scene and his imagination triumphantly expands to fill it. No other English poet has such a God-like vision of the world, a vision revealed in the great pictures of boundless chaos and warring elements and in the constant suggestion of vast distances. He is at his best in imagery suggestive of vast size, limitless space, abysmal depth, and light and darkness. No theme and no setting other than that which he chose in **Paradise Lost** could have given him such scope for the kind of imagery in which he excelled.

In **Paradise Lost** Milton had undertaken to present not the world of human experience, but a supernatural world, peopled by supernatural beings, God and His Son, angels and archangels, devils, a world in which Sin and Death may be personified without palpable absurdity. Even his human pair—Adam and Eve—are exceptional beings, from whom we are prepared not to demand confirmity to the laws of life which now prevail in our world. Had he presented all these spiritual personages in definite form to the eye, the result would have been degrading. We should have the ridiculous instead of the sublime. The world of **Paradise Lost** is an ideal world, quite as much as the world of the **Arabian Nights** or the world of the chivalrous romance. In his pictures of such a world, Milton did not aim at that finish of minute parts in which each bit fits into every other. For it was only by such disregard of the minute that the theme could be handled at all. The impression of vastness, the sense that everything "runs into infinity" would have been destroyed if he had laid emphasis on the detail of his figures.

Milton is not, like Dante, always seeing; he is mostly thinking in a dream, or as Coleridge best expressed it, "he is not a picturesque, but a musical poet." For example, in describing Satan Milton has never thought of taking the measure of Satan. He merely gives a vague idea of his vast bulk. When he addresses himself to battle against the guardian angels, he stands like Atlas; his stature reaches the sky. Moreover, instead of describing Paradise of his own imagination, Milton actually arouses the imagination of the readers so that they can find in their depth the Paradisal light of which all explicit images are only the momentary reflection. C. S. Lewis referring to this characteristic of Milton's imagery and its effects on the reader's imagination remarks: "We are his organs; when he appears to be describing Paradise, he is in fact drawing out Paradisal Stop in us."

The images of Milton are vague, but highly suggestive. For example, in the opening lines of **Paradise Lost** all images that can suggest a great thing beginning have been brought together. Here he gives the image of creation of the world itself (Dove-like sat'st brooding) and then the image of Heaven and Earth which "rose out of chaos" etc. But we cannot expect any kind of vividness or definiteness in these pictures, because that would be unsuitable. Referring to the dimness of Milton's imagery, T. S. Eliot remarks: "We must not, then, in reading **Paradise Lost**, not expect to see clearly; our sense of sight must be blurred, so that our hearing may

become acute....The emphasis is on the sound, not the vision; upon the word, not the idea."

In the use of similes Milton is more elaborate than any other English poet. Generally he uses epic similes in order to maintain dignity and distance by choosing comparisons from history and mythology or from great and strange things in Nature—the sun, the moon, the sea, planets in opposition, a shooting star, an evening mist, a will o' the wisp, a vulture descending from the Himalayas, the madness of Alcides, the rape of Proserpine, and a hundred more reminiscences of the ancient world. He does not confine himself within the limits of strict comparison; his great excellence is vastness and he expands the casual image beyond the dimension which the occasion required. For example, comparing the shield of Satan to the orb of the Moon, he crowds the imagination with the discovery of the telescope, and all the wonders which the telescope discovers.

Milton's huge epic similes reach both backward and forward, embracing in their span all history and space. When Eve is compared to Proserpine, we know that she will be victimised by Satan as Proserpine was gathered by Dis. When she is compared to Cerse, the implication is that she will reduce Adam from God's image to "the inglorious likeness of a beast." Again when she is compared to Pandora, we are compelled to think of Pandora's triviality and all the suffering which her trivial action lets loose. This anticipatory usage is characteristic of **Paradise Lost**, and of this type of epic similes Milton is considered by some critics as their inventor. Such similes have the quality of superhuman permanence about them.

5. **The Sublime Quality of Milton's Poetry.** Sublimity is the most distinguishing and characteristic quality in Milton's poetry. His poetry is most universally admired for its sublimity—the capacity to enlarge the imagination of the reader. In fact, certain critics have asserted that in the sublimity of his thought and expression, Milton excelled both the ancient and the modern poets. Referring to the sublimity of Milton's poetry, Dr. Johnson remaked, "Milton considered creation in its whole extent, and his descriptions are, therefore, learned. He had accustomed his imagination to unrestrained indulgence, and his conceptions, therefore, were extensive. The characteristic quality of his poem is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural part is gigantic loftiness.

He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish."

In **Paradise Lost**, Milton has brought a fine fusion of sublime thought and sublime expression. His style possesses "grandeur" and "elevation," on account of which it is rightly called the "grand style." Describing the effect of Milton's grand style on the readers, C. S. Lewis has very aptly remarked : "He sweeps us along as though we were attending an actual recitation, and nowhere allows us to settle down and luxuriate on any line or paragraph. It is common to speak of Milton's style as organ music. It might be more helpful to regard the reader as the organ and Milton as the organist. It is on us he plays, if we let him."

Milton produces the effect of sublimity by three things : (1) The use of slightly unfamiliar words and construction, including archaisms. (2) The use of proper names, not solely for their sound, but because they are the names of splendid, remote, terrible, voluptuous or celebrated things. They are there to encourage a sweep of the reader's eye over the richness and variety of the world. (3) Continued allusion to all the sources of heightened interest in our sense experience (light, darkness, storm, flowers, love, etc.), but all managed with an air of magnanimity. (4) Continuity in the flow of speech which makes the reader feel that he is following a great unflagging voice. He does not allow the reader to settle down at each sentence. Even the fuller pause at the end of a paragraph is like a pause of music, where the silence is part of the music.

Matthew Arnold who considered Milton's poetry as the model of grand style, remarked : "Milton, of all our English race, is by his diction and rhythm the one artist of the highest rank in the great style, whom we have."

CHAPTER V

DRYDEN AND THE RESTORATION

After the Restoration in 1660, when Charles II came to the throne, there was a complete repudiation of the Puritan ideals and the way of living. In English literature the period from 1660 to (1700) is called the period of Restoration, because monarchy was restored in England, and Charles II, the son of Charles I who had been defeated and beheaded, came back from exile in France and became the King. It is called the **Age of Dryden**, because Dryden was the dominating and most representative literary figure of this period. As the Puritans, who were previously controlling the country, and were supervising her literary, moral and social standards, were finally defeated, a reaction was launched against whatever they held sacred. All restraints and discipline were thrown to the winds, and a wave of licentiousness and frivolity swept the country. Charles II and his followers who had enjoyed a gay life in France during their exile, did their best to introduce that type of foppery and looseness in England also. They renounced old ideals and demanded that English poetry should follow the style to which they had become accustomed in the gaiety of Paris. Instead of having Shakespeare and the Elizabethans as their models, the poets of the Restoration period began to imitate French writers and especially their vices.

The result was that the old Elizabethan spirit with its patriotism, its love of adventure and romance, and the Puritan spirit with its moral discipline and love of liberty, became things of the past. For a time in poetry nothing was produced which could compare satisfactorily with the great achievements of the Elizabethans, of Milton, and even of minor writers of the Puritan age. But then the writers of the period began to evolve something that was characteristic of the times, and they made two important contributions to English poetry in the form of **realism** and a tendency to **preciseness.**

In the beginning realism took an ugly shape, because the writers painted the real picture of corrupt society and court. They

were more concerned with vices rather than with virtues. The result was a coarse and inferior type of poetry. Later this tendency to realism became more wholesome, and the writers tried to portray realistically human life as they found it—its good as well as bad side, its internal as well as external shape.

The tendency to realism, which ultimately became the chief characteristic of the Restoration period, made a lasting contribution to English literature. It emphasised directness and simplicity of expression, and counterbalanced the tendency of exaggeration and extravagance which was encouraged during the Elizabethan and the Puritan ages. Instead of using grandiloquent phrases and classical allusions, the Restoration writers, under the influence of French writers, gave emphasis to reasoning rather than romantic fancy, and evolved an exact, precise way of writing, consisting of short, clear-cut sentences without any unnecessary word. The Royal Society, which was established during this period, enjoined on all its members to use "a close, naked, natural way of speaking and writing, as near the mathematical plainness as they can". Dryden accepted this rule for his prose, and for his poetry adopted the easiest type of verse form—the heroic couplet. Under his guidance, the English writers evolved a style—precise, formal and elegant—which is called the classical style, and which dominated English poetry for more than a century.

JOHN DRYDEN
(1631—1700)

Dryden was the supreme master of the Restoration poetry which was mostly satirical, realistic and written in the heroic couplet. He was the dominating figure of the Restoration period, and he made his mark into the field of poetry, drama and prose. In the field of poetry he was, in fact, the only poet worth mentioning. In his youth he came under the influence of Cowley, and his early poetry has the characteristic conceits and exaggeration of the metaphysical school. But in his later years he emancipated himself from the false taste and artificial style of the metaphysical writers, and wrote in a clear, forceful style which laid the foundation of the classical school of poetry in England.

The poetry of Dryden can be conveniently divided under three heads—**Political Satires, Dotrinal Poems** and **The Fables.** Of his political satires **Absolem and Achitophel** and **The Medal** are well-known. In **Absolem and Achitophel,** which is one of

the greatest political satires in the English language, Dryden defended the King against the Earl of Shaftesbury who is represented as Achitophel. It contains powerful character studies of Shaftesbury and of the Duke of Buckingham who is represented as Zimri. The **Medal** is another satirical poem full of invective against Shaftesbury and MacFlecknoe. It also contains a scathing personal attack on Thomas Shadwell who was once a friend of Dryden.

The two doctrinal poems of Dryden are **Religio Laici** and **The Hind and the Panther.** These poems are neither religious nor devotional but theological and controversial. The first was written when Dryden was a Protestant, and it defends the Church of England. The second was written when Dryden had become a Catholic, and it vehemently defends Catholicism. They, therefore, show Dryden's power and skill of defending any position he took up, and his mastery in presenting argument in verse.

The Fables, which were written during the last years of Dryden's life, show no decrease in his poetic power. Written in the form of a narrative, they entitle Dryden to rank among the best story-tellers in verse in England. **The Palamon and Arcite** which is based on Chaucer's **Knight's Tale,** gives us an opportunity of comparing the method and art of fourteenth century poet with one belonging to the seventeenth century. Of the many miscellaneous poems of Dryden, **Annus Mirabilis** is a fine example of his sustained narrative power. His **Alexander's Feast** is one of the best odes in the English language.

The poetry of Dryden possesses all the characteristics of the Restoration period and is therefore thoroughly representative of that age. It does not have the poetic glow, the spiritual fervour, the moral loftiness and the philosophical depth which were sadly lacking in the Restoration period. But it has the formalism, the intellectual precision, the argumentative skill and realism which were the main characteristics of that age. Though Dryden does not reach great poetic heights, yet here and there he gives us passages of wonderful strength and eloquence. His reputation lies in his being great as a satirist and reasoner in verse. In fact in these two capacities he is still the greatest master in English poetry. Dryden's greatest contribution to English poetry was his skilful use of the heroic couplet, which became the accepted measure of serious English poetry for many years.

Critical opinions about the merits of Dryden as a poet have remained on the whole very equable. Though the growing reputation of Pope in the early eighteenth century put him in a shade for some time, yet he has always been considered as a great, though a limited, poet. He is recognised by all as the chief imitator of the classical period in English poetry, and also superior to all his successors in the classical style except Pope. Though Arnold in the nineteenth century brought him low, T.S. Eliot in the twentieth century has pushed him up again. Whatever his critical fortunes may be in the future, Dryden's place in English poetry as the greatest poetical craftsman is secure.

Addison praised Dryden's artful poetry which pleases always and everybody. In *An Account of the Greatest English Poets* (1694) Addison wrote :—

> But see where artful Dryden next appears,
> Grown old in rhyme, but charming ev'n in years,
> Great Dryden next, whose tuneful muse affords
> The sweetest numbers, and the fittest words.
> Whether in comic sounds or tragic airs
> She forms her voice, she moves our smiles or tears,
> If satire of heroic strains she writes,
> Her hero pleases and her satire bites,
> From her no harsh unartful numbers fall,
> She wears all dresses, and she charms us all.

Dr. Johnson who considered Dryden as a great argumentative poet dealing with social, political and religious controversies, wrote in *Life of Dryden* (1779) :

"In a general survey of Dryden's labours he appears to have had a mind very comprehensive by nature, and much enriched with acquired knowledge. His compositions are the effects of a vigorous genius operating upon large materials.

"The power that predominated in his intellectual operations was rather strong reason than quick sensibility. Upon all occasions that were presented he studied rather than felt, and produced sentiments not such as Nature enforces, but meditation supplies. With the simple and elemental passions, as they spring separate in the mind, he seems not much acquainted and seldom describes them as they are complicated by the various relations of society and confused in the tumults and agitation of life.

"He is therefore, with all his variety of excellence, not often pathetic, and had so little sensibility of the power of effusions purely

natural that he did not esteem them in others...he could more easily fill the ear with some splendid novelty than awaken those ideas that slumber in the heart......

"When once he had engaged himself in disputation, thoughts flowed in on either side: he was now no longer at a loss; he had always objections and solutions at command......

"Of Dryden's works it was said by Pope that 'he could select from them better specimens of every mode of poetry than any other English writer could supply'. Perhaps no nation ever produced a writer that enriched his language with such variety of models. To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre, the refinement of our language, and much of the correctness of our sentiments. By him we were taught to think naturally and express forcibly. It may perhaps be maintained that he was the first who joined argument with poetry......he found it brick, and he left it marble."

Wordsworth, who admired Dryden's talents and genius, but did not consider him a poetical genius, wrote to Scott in 1805 :—

"I admire Dryden's talents and *Genius* greatly, but he is not a poetical genius. The only qualities I can find in Dryden that are *essentially* poetical are a certain ardour and impetuosity of mind with an excellent air; it may seem strange that I do not add to this great command of language, too, as it is most desirable that a poet should possess, or rather, that he should not be without; but it is not language that is in high sense of the word poetical, being neither of the imagination nor of the passions; I mean of the amiable, the ennobling, of the intense passions; I do not mean to say that there is nothing of this in Dryden, but as little, I think, as is possible, considering how much he has written. You will easily understand my meaning when I refer to his versification of *Palamon and Arcite*, as contrasted with the language of Chaucer. Dryden has neither a tender heart nor a lofty sense of moral dignity : where his language is poetically impassioned, it is mostly upon unpleasing subjects; such as the follies, vices, and crimes of classes of men or of individuals. That his cannot be the language of imagination must have necessarily followed from this, that there is not a single image from Nature in the whole body of his works."

Hazlitt, who considered Dryden as the supreme among artificial poets, wrote in *A Critical List of Authors* (1824) :—

"Dryden stands nearly at the head of the second class of English poets, *viz.*, the *artificial*, or those who describe the mixed modes of artificial life, and convey general precepts and abstract ideas. He had invention in the plan of his *Satires*, very little fancy, not much art, no humour, immense strength of character, elegance, masterly ease, indignant contempt approaching to the sublime, not a particle of tenderness, but eloquent declamation, the perfection of uncorrupted English style, and of sounding, vehement, varied versification. The *Alexander's Feast*, his *Fables* and *Satires*, are his standard and lasting works."

Macaulay, who considered Dryden as the best among the second-rate poets, wrote in his essay, *John Dryden* (1828) :—

"The first rank in poetry was beyond his reach; but he challenged and secured the most honourable place in the second. His imagination resembled the wings of an ostrich. It enabled him to run, though not to soar. When he attempted the highest flights, he became ridiculous; but, while he remained in a lower region, he outstripped all competitors......

"He possessed, in a pre-eminent degree, the power of reasoning in verse. His logic is by no means uniformly sound. On points of criticism he always reasons ingeniously and, when he is disposed to be honest, correctly. But the theological and political questions which he undertook to treat in verse were precisely those which he understood least. His arguments, therefore, are often worthless. But the manner in which they are stated is beyond all praise. The style is transparent. The topics follow each other in the happiest order. The objections are drawn up in such a manner that the whole fire of the reply may be brought to bear on them. The illustrations at once adorn and elucidate the reasoning."

Matthew Arnold, who considered Dryden as a prose poet, wrote in *The Study of Poetry* (1880) :—

"We are to regard Dryden as the puissant and glorious founder, Pope as the splendid high priest, of our age of prose and reason, of our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century. For the purpose of their mission and destiny, their poetry, like their prose, is admirable. Do you ask whether Dryden's verse, take it almost where you will, is not good?

> A milk-white Hind, immortal and unchanged,
> Fed on the lawns and in the forest ranged.

I answer: Admirable for the purpose of the inaugurator of an age and reason......But do you ask me whether such verse proceeds from men with an adequate poetic criticism of life, from men whose criticism of life has a high seriousness, or even, without that high seriousness, has poetic largeness, freedom, insight, benignity? Do you ask me whether the application of ideas to life in the verse of these men, often a powerful application, no doubt, is a powerful poetic *application?* Do you ask me whether the poetry of these men has either the matter or the inseparable manner of such an adequate poetic criticism; whether it has the accent of

> Absent thee from felicity awhile......

or of

> And what is else not to be overcome......

or of

> O martyr sounded in virginitee

I answer: It has not and cannot have them; it is the poetry of the builders of an age of prose and reason. Though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain be masters of the art of versifications, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose."

T.S. Eliot, who is the greatest supporter of *Dryden* in the twentieth century, has blamed the nineteenth century critics for having failed to properly appreciate the poetry of Dryden on account of their own shortcomings. In his essay *John Dryden* (1922) he writes:

"To those whose taste in poetry is formed entirely upon the English poetry of the nineteenth century—to the majority—it is difficult to explain or excuse Dryden: the twentieth century is still the nineteenth, although it may in time acquire its own character: The nineteenth century had, like every other, limited tastes, and peculiar fashions; and, like every other, it was unaware of its own limitations. Its tastes and fashions had no place for Dryden; yet Dryden is one of the tests of a Catholic appreciation of poetry.

"With regard to Dryden, we can say this much. Our taste in English poetry has been largely founded upon a partial perception of the value of Shakespeare and Milton, a perception which dwells upon sublimity of theme and action. Shakespeare had a great deal more; he had nearly everything to satisfy our various desires

for poetry. The point is that the depreciation or neglect of Dryden is not due to the fact that the material, the feelings, out of which he built, is not poetic. Thus Matthew Arnold, in mentioning Dryden and Pope together, said that 'their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits : genuine poetry is conceived in the soul'...

"It would be true to say that Dryden is distinguished principally by his *poetic* ability, we prize him for what he made of his material. Our estimate is only in part the appreciation of ingenuity : in the end the result is poetry. Much of Dryden's unique merit consists in his ability to make the small into the great, the prosaic into the poetic, the trivial into the magnificent. In this he differs not only from Milton, who required a canvas of the largest size, but from Pope who required one of the smallest. If you compare any satiric 'character' of Pope with one of Dryden, you will see that the method and intention are widely divergent. When Pope alters, he diminishes; he is a master of miniature. The singular skill of his portrait of Addison, for example, in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, depends upon the justice and reserve, the apparent determination not to exaggerate. The genius of Pope is not for caricature. But the effects of the portraits of Dryden is to transform the object into something greater......

"Sometimes the wit appears a delicate flavour to the magnificence, as in *Alexander's Feast* :

> Sooth'd with the sound the king grew vain ;
> Fought all his battles o'er again ;
> And thrice he routed all his foes, and thrice he slew the slain.

"The great advantage of Dryden over Milton is that while the former is always in control of his ascent, and can rise or fall at will, the latter has elected a perch from which he cannot afford to fall, and from which he is in danger of slipping.

"Dryden lacked large and unique view of life, he lacked profundity. But where Dryden fails to satisfy, the nineteenth century does not satisfy us either; and where that century has condemned him, it is itself condemned. In the next revolution of taste it is possible that poets may turn to the study of Dryden. He remains one of those who have set standards for English verse which it is desperate to ignore."

Now let us examine some important characteristics of Dryden as a poet.

1. **Dryden as a Satirist.** The Restoration period, in which Dryden lived, specialised in satire. As the worldly life was given great importance, respect for conventional values and standards became stronger. Fashions and refined culture exercised great control over the minds of the people. The rational approach to life and its problems led to the formulation of rules. As the principles of right behaviour were well defined, it was easy to judge and condemn. The expression of one's judgment in literary terms became a highly natural exercise of the critical faculty. Moreover, the best way of acquiring prestige and success was to appeal to the enlightened opinion.

On the other hand, the Restoration of monarchy, with its foppery and licentiousness, led to a revolt against austerity and a reaction against hypocrisy. The feelings of sincerity and independence had come to the forefront. The writers took pleasure in openly denouncing false spiritual authorities, and advocating licentiousness. The Restoration satirists were realistic, crude and biting, because they were not very sure whether they were writing in the name of morality and its defence, or against it.

Political conflict was also responsible for the violence of the tone of satirists. During the Civil War and Protectorate under Cromwell the writers like Milton had indulged in severe political controversies in which passions were roused to the highest pitch. With the coming of Charles II, the political as well as religious conflicts were further eccentuated, and the writers poured forth their frenzy in the form of lampoons and satires.

Besides these, the classical influences encouraged the use of satire as in the ancient days the satirists were greatly honoured. The works of such satirists as Persius, Horace and Juvenal had become very popular during the Restoration period, and they were translated and imitated. Moreover, satire was in fashion with the French, and Boileau was its brilliant exponent. Thus there was revived a scholarly and somewhat artificial style of writing.

Dryden, being the greatest poet of the Restoration period, was also the greatest satirist. He wrote his great satires when he was over fifty. By that time he had attained full mastery over the poetic expression. Moreover, he had become sufficiently mature and wise to exercise restraint and control over his prejudices. Being the poet laureate he supported monarchy and opposed all those who tried to undermine the power of the king. In *The Medal*, he denounced the

most dangerous opponents of the king, the middle class whigs of the town, and their leader Shaftesbury. In *MacFlecknoe* he severely criticised his former friend, Shadwell, against whom he had many grievances. In these satires, through the violence of his tone is equal to that of his contemporaries, yet his mastery of expression allowed him a scrupulous attention to form, and the fire of his inspiration is tempered by the full and clear consciousness of the artist.

Absolem and Achitophel is the greatest political satire of Dryden. He did not show any originality in the selection of the material. No theme was more generally familiar for the purpose of satire than the utilisation of biblical personages and scenes. In 1680, a hostile pamphleteer likened Manmouth to Absolem; in 1681, a satirist had dubbed Shaftesbury as Achitophel. In this ready-made frame, Dryden displays all the classical power of form. This satire has a clear and well thought-out plan' and this construction has an architectural quality which can compare well with the literary composition of Milton and Shakespeare. The details of the Popish plot to overthrow king Charles II, on which the satire has been built up, are worked in by a touch that is broad and free, with a wonderful accuracy. The innate goodness, the beneficent majesty of the kind-hearted king radiates from the work and irresistibly wins the sympathy of the readers. On the other hand, the attractive but misguided son, Manmouth, and his supporters like Shaftesbury and Zimri, are severely criticised and put to ridicule. Dryden here shows himself a past master in the presentation of argument in the form of speeches as well as in the felicity of picturesque characterisation.

The greatness of Dryden as a satirist lies in the fact that he does not lose his temper, and raves and rents and denounces with the air of an inspired prophet. His manner towards his subjects is that of a cool and not ill-humoured scorn. The person he satirises are no doubt great scoundrels, but they are probably even more contemptible than vicious. The well-known line

> They got a villain, and we lost a fool,

expresses this attitude admirably.

Another great peculiarity of Dryden's satire, in which he stands alone, is that he attacks not merely types, or merely individuals, but both. The satire, in which only types are satirised, is prone to become a declamation against vice and folly in the abstract. On the other hand, if the individuals are satirised, there comes the suspicion of

personal enmity, and it is felt that the requirement of art, the disengagement of the general law from the individual instance, is not sufficiently attended to. Dryden's figures are always at once types and individuals. Zimri stands for Buckingham and at the same time represents the idle aristocrat who plays at politics and at learning. Achitophel is at once Shaftesbury and the abstract intriguer ; and so forth. In drawing these satirical portraits, Dryden has exercised a singular judgment in selecting his traits.

2. **Dryden as a Didactic Poet.** Besides being a satirist Dryden was the greatest didactic poet of his age. He possessed to the highest degree the faculty of arguing a point in verse. While arguing his point, he sees, for the time being, only the point which he has set himself to prove, and is quite careless of the fact that he has proved something very different yesterday and is very likely to prove something different still to-morrow. Besides his merely logical power, Dryden had other qualities necessary for a didactic writer. He was fertile in the art of illustration and a past master in concealing the weakness of his argument by a happy simile and jest.

The two famous didactic poems of Dryden are **Religio Laici** and **The Hind and the Panther**. Religio Laici, which is considered as the best didactic poem in the English language, places in the clearest possible terms a serious argument in verse on the credibility of Christian religion and the merits of the Anglican form of doctrine and Church government. This poem was written by Dryden when he was fifty-one. Before that he had never written about religious matters, and in fact many of the plays which he wrote before that time, had advocated loose and frivolous manners. But Dryden was never consistent, and he could easily adapt himself to any kind of work he cared to take up. The poem expresses the first thoughts of Dryden on a subject which had presented itself to him as interesting and important. There is nothing novel or forcible in the arguments, but they are presented with ease and cogency which are characteristic of all Dryden's didactic work.

The Hind and the Panther (1687) is the chief didactic work of Dryden from the points of view of bulk and originality. It is an elaborate argument in favour of Roman Catholicism, to which Dryden had been converted ; whereas in **Religio Laici** (1682) he had defended the Church of England against Catholicism. The poem is divided into three parts. The first part contains the correspondence of different beasts to the different churches and sects ; the

second contains the major part of the controversy between the Hind and the Panther; the third continues this controversy but soon diverges into allegorical and personal satire. The stories told by the Panther (of the Swallows) and by the Hind (of the Doves) are magnificent.

The Hind and the Panther is not a regular or classically proportioned work of art. Dryden used the main theme mainly to embroider on it all sorts of episodes, digressions and ornaments. It, of course, provoked a severe controversy, and Dryden's opponents contrasted his argument in **Religio Laici** with his argument in **The Hind and the Panther.** He was condemned as a turn-coat and in fact the opposition to him became so severe that it is said that Dryden wept at the attack.

3. **Dryden as a Poetic Artist.** The real greatness of Dryden as a poet lies in the excellent treatment of any subject that he takes up. He has dealt with great themes in his poetry. The subject-matter of most of his poems consists of political or religious controversy and the defence or condemnation of one party or the other. Moreover, Dryden was not gifted with that faculty of imagination which enables a poet like Shakespeare and Milton to scale great poetic heights. But there is one field in which Dryden excels all other English poets, and that is his power of treating any subject he takes up, even the most trivial, in the best possible manner, by means of his poetic technique.

For the purpose of the treatment of all sorts of subjects in an admirable manner Dryden evolved and perfected the heroic couplet, and that is his greatest contribution to English poetry and prosody. It was in his heroic play that Dryden got an enormous practice in the use of the heroic couplet, before he used it with admirable skill and facility in his satiric and didactic poems. Without his practice in these plays, Dryden's couplet would not have attained the astonishing and unique combination of ease and force; of regularity and variety which it displays in **Absolem and Achitophel** and **MacFlecknoe,** in **Religio Laici** and **The Hind and the Panther.**

Dryden's heroic couplet is not, like Pope's, "bred in and in" and severely trained and exercised to a typical but somewhat limited perfection. It is full-blooded, exuberant and multiform.

Dryden changed his style as he turned from one theme to another in quest of an audience and a livelihood, for Dryden is the first English poet who lived mainly and wholly by his pen. He was the first English poet to discover and prove that a poet may play a part in the political life of the country by taking an active part in the warfare which the court was waging against its opponents. Therefore he had to deal with the subjects, social and political, which absorbed the interests of the town, and in a style which reflected the taste for brilliant conversation or dignified and sonorous oratory. The changes in Dryden's style mark his advance towards such a command of argumentative conversation or debate.

Referring to Dryden as a poetic craftsman, Prof. Saintsbury has rightly remarked : "Dryden is always striving, and consciously striving, to find better literary forms, a better vocabulary, better metres, better constructions, better style. He may, in no one branch, have attained the entire and flawless perfection which distinguishes Pope as far as he goes. But the range of Dryden is to the range of Pope as that of a forest to a shrubbery, and in this case priority is everything, and the priority is on the side of Dryden. He is not our greatest poet, far from it. But there is one point in which the superlative may safely be applied to him. Considering what he started with, what he accomplished, and what advantages he left to his successors, he must be pronounced with exception, **the great craftsman in English letters**, and as such he ought to be regarded with peculiar veneration by all who, in however humble a capacity, are connected with the craft.........

"So long as anyone holds a definition of poetry which regards it wholly or chiefly from the point of view of its subject matter, wide differences are unavoidable. But if we hold what I venture to think the only Catholic faith with regard to it, that it consists not in a selection of subjects, but in a method of treatment, then it seems to me that all difficulty vanishes......what constitutes a great poet is supremacy in his own line of poetic expression. Such supremacy must of course be shown in work of sufficient bulk and variety, on the principle that one swallow does not make a summer......Dryden's peculiar gift, in which no poet of any language has surpassed him, is the faculty of treating any subject, which he does treat, poetically. His range is enormous, and wherever it is deficient, it is possible to see that external circumstances had to do with the apparent limitations. That the author of the tremendous satire of the political

pieces should be author of the exquisite lyrics scattered about the plays; that the special pleader of *Religio Laici* should be taleteller of *Palomen and Arcite*, are things which, the more carefully I study other poets and their comparatively limited perfection, astonish me the more."

CHAPTER VI

POPE AND THE CLASSICAL AGE

The early part of the eighteenth century or the Augustan or Classical Age in English literature is called the Age of Pope because Pope was the dominating figure in that period. The poetry of this age was dominated by the classical school of poetry. During this age the people were disgusted with the profligacy and frivolity of the Restoration period, and they insisted upon those elementary decencies of life and conduct which were looked at with contempt by the preceding generation. Moreover, they had no sympathy for the fanaticism and religious zeal of the Puritans who were out to ban even the most innocent means of recreation. So they wanted to follow the middle path in everything and steer clear of the emotional as well as moral excesses. They insisted on the role of intelligence in everything. The poets of this period are deficient on the side of emotion and imagination. Dominated by the intellect, poetry of this age is commonly didactic and satirical, a poetry of argument and criticism, of politics and personalities.

In the second place, the poets of this age are more interested in the town, and the 'cultural society.' They have no sympathy for the humbler aspects of life—the life of the villagers, the shepherds; and no love for nature, the beautiful flowers, the songs of birds, and landscape as we find in the poets of the Romantic period. Though they preached a virtuous life, they would not display any feeling which smacked of enthusiasm and earnestness. Naturally they had no regard for the great poets of the human heart—Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton. They had no attachment for the Middle Ages and their tales of chivalry, adventure and visionary idealism. Spenser, therefore, did not find favour with them.

In the poetry of this age, form became more important than substance. This love of superficial polish led to the establishment of a highly artificial and conventional style. The closed couplet became the only possible form for serious work in verse. Naturally poetry became monotonous, because the couplet was too narrow and inflexible to be made the vehicle of high passion and strong imagination. More-

over, as great emphasis was laid on the imitation of ancient writers, originality was discouraged, and poetry lost touch with the real life of the people.

Prose being the prominent medium of expression, the rules of exactness, precision and clarity, which were insisted in the writing of prose, also began to be applied to poetry. It was demanded of the poet to say all that he had to say in a plain, simple and clear language. The result was that the quality of suggestiveness, which adds so much to the beauty and worth of poetry, was sadly lacking in the poetry of this age. The meaning of poetry was all on the surface, and there was nothing which required deep study and varied interpretation.

ALEXANDER POPE

(1688—1744)

Pope is considered as the greatest poet of the Classical period. He is 'prince of classicism' as Prof. Elton calls him. He was an invalid, of small stature and delicate constitution, whose bad nerves and cruel headaches made his life, in his own phrase, a 'long disease.' Moreover, being a Catholic he had to labour under various restrictions. But the wonder is that in spite of his manifold handicaps, this small, ugly man has left a permanent mark on the literature of his age. He was highly intellectual, extremely ambitious and capable of tremendous industry. These qualities brought him to the front rank of men of letters, and during his lifetime he was looked upon as a model poet.

The main quality of Pope's poetry is its carrectness. It was at the age of twenty-five that he published his **Essay on Criticism** (1711), and since then till the end of his life he enjoyed progidious reputation. In this essay Pope insists on following the rules discovered by the Ancients, because they are in harmony with Nature :

> Those rules of old discovered, not devised
> Are Nature still, but Nature methodised.

Pope's next work, **The Rape of the Lock**, is in some way his masterpiece. It is a 'mock heroic' poem in which he celebrated the theme of the stealth, by Lord Petre, of a lock of hair from the head of Miss Arabella. Though the poem is written in a jest and deals with a very insignificant event, it is given the form of an epic, investing this frivolous event with mock seriousness and dignity.

By this time Pope had perfected the heroic couplet, and he made use of his technical skill in translating Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which meant eleven years' very hard work. The reputation which Pope now enjoyed created a host of jealous rivals whom he severely criticised and ridiculed in **The Dunciad.** This is Pope's greatest satire in which he attacked all sorts of literary incompetence. It is full of cruel and insulting couplets on his enemies. His next great poem was **The Essay on Man** (1732-34), which is full of brilliant oft-quoted passages and lines. His later works—**Imitations of Horace** and **Epistle**—are also satires and contain biting attacks on his enemies.

Though Pope enjoyed a tremendous reputation during his lifetime and for some decades after his death, he was so bitterly attacked during the nineteenth century that it was doubted whether Pope was a poet at all. But in the twenteenth century this reaction has subsided, and now it is admitted by great critics that though much that Pope wrote is prosaic, and not of a very high order, yet a part of his poetry is undoubtedly indestructible. He is the supreme master of the epigrammatic style, of condensing an idea into a line or couplet. Of course, the thoughts in his poetry are commonplace, but they are given the most appropriate and perfect expression.

During his lifetime Pope was universally praised as the greatest poet. In *An Essay on Mr. Pope*, Spense, a contemporary of Pope, wrote :

"It is Pope who took up that great rule of the *sound's being a comment on the sense*, and enforced it beyond any of the critics who went before him. To this writer we chiefly owe the revival of the noble art of numbers ; and the method of signifying motions, and actions, and all that vast variety of our passions, by *sounds*. In his incomparable *Essay on Criticism*, this writer has given us the best advices, and interwoven the most beautiful examples into them, in a manner that will always be admired. The first stanza, in his *Ode on St. Caecillia's Day*, is the fullest piece of this kind perhaps extant in any language : 'tis itself a perfect concert. In the translations of Homer, we find him very frequent, and very just, in the same manner of expressing things : I call it so ; and could almost be persuaded to think it a better way of expressing, than is the common way of *words*. They have a sense affixt to them by custom ; while the other speaks by the ideas of things. That is a flowing, variable help : this is the voice of nature and a sort of *universal* poetical language."

Ten years after Pope's death, Warton had the courage to point out the limitations of Pope. In his *Life of Pope* (1781) he wrote :—

"Permit me to break into your retirement, the residence of virtue and literature, and to trouble you with a few reflections on the merits and real character of an admired author, and on other collateral subjects of criticism, that will naturally arise in the course of such an inquiry. No love of singularity, no affectation of paradoxical opinions, gave rise to the following work. I revere the memory of Pope, I respect and honour his abilities ; but I do not think him at the head of his profession. In other words in that species of poety wherein Pope excelled he is superior to all mankind ; but I do not think him at the head of his profession. In other words, in that species of poetry wherein Pope excelled, he is superior to at all mankind : and I only say, that this species of poetry is not the most excellent one of the art.

"We do not, it would seem, sufficiently attend to the difference there is, betwixt a Man of Wit, a Man of Sense, and a True Poet. Donne and Swift were undoubtedly men of wit, and men of sense ; but what traces have they left of Pure Poetry ? It is remarkable, that Dryden says of Donne : He was the greatest wit, tho' not the greatest poet of this nation...All I plead for is to impress on the reader, that a clear head, and acute understanding are not sufficient, alone, to make a Poet, that the most solid observations on human life, expressed with the utmost elegance and brevity, are morality, and not Poetry ; and that it is a creative and glowing imagination, and that alone, that can stamp a writer with this exalted and very uncommon character, which so few possess, and of which so few can properly judge.

"The Sublime and the Pathetic are the two chief nerves of all genuine poesy. What is there transcendently Sublime or Pathetic in Pope."

Dr. Johnson, who admired Pope's versification and for making the best use of his faculties, wrote in his *Life of Pope* (1781) :—

"With such faculties, and such dispositions Pope excelled every other writer in *poetical prudence* ; he wrote in such a manner as might expose him to few hazards. He used almost the same fabric of verse ; and by those few essays which he made of any other, he did not enlarge his reputation. Of this uniformity, the certain consequence was readiness and dexterity. By perpetual practice, language had in his mind a systematical arrangement ; having always the same use

for words, he had words so selected and combined as to be ready at his call....

"Pope was not content to satisfy; he desired to excel, and therefore always endeavoured to do his best: he did not court the candour, but dared the judgment of his reader, and expecting no indulgence from others, he showed none to himself. He examined lines and words with minute punctilious observation, and retouched every part with indefatigable diligence, till he had left nothing to be forgiven. It will seldom be found that he altered without adding clearness, elegance, or vigour."

Bowles, who considered Pope as a past master in describing artificial life, but deficient in the description of natural objects and therefore not a great poet, wrote in *Observation on the Poetic Character of Pope*:

"No one can stand pre-eminent as a great Poet, unless he has not only a heart susceptible of the most pathetic or most exalted feelings of Nature, but an eye *attentive to*, and *familiar with*, every external appearance that she may exhibit, in every change of season, every variation of light and shade, every rock, every tree, every leaf, in her solitary places. He who has not an eye to observe these, and who cannot with a glance distinguish every diversity of hue in her variety of beauties, must so far be deficient in one of the essential qualities of a Poet.

"Here Pope, from infirmities, and from physical causes, was particularly deficient. When he left his own laurel circus at Twickenham, he was lifted into his chariot or his barge; and with weak eyes, and tottering strength, it is physically impossible he could be a *descriptive* Bard. Where description has been introduced among his Poems, as far as his observation could go, he excelled; more could not be expected...

"But how different, how minute his description, when he describes what he is master of: for instance, the game of Ombre, in *The Rape of the Lock*? This is from *artificial life*; and with artificial life, from his infirmities, he must have been chiefly conversant...*The Rape of the Lock* will, first and last, present itself...a composition, as Johnson justly observes, the 'most elegant, the most airy,' of all his works; a composition, to which it will be vain to compare anything of its kind. He stands alone, unrivalled, and possibly never to be rivalled. All Pope's successful labour of correct and musical versification, all his talents of accurate description,

though in any inferior province of poetry, are here consummately displayed; and as far as artificial life, that is, Manners, not Passions, are capable of being rendered, poetical, they are here rendered so, by the fancy, the propriety, the elegance, and the poetic beauty of Sylphic machinery.

"This 'delightful' Poem, as I have said, appears to stand conspicuous and beautiful, in that medium where Fancy begins to leave Nature, and *approximates to local manners.* The Muse has, indeed, no longer her great characteristic attributes, pathos or sublimity, but she appears so interesting, that we almost doubt whether the garb of elegant refinement is not as captivating, as the most beautiful appearances of Nature."

Among the Romantic poets Byron was the only one who admired Pope. In his *Letters and Journals* (1830), he wrote :—

"Those miserable mountebanks of the day, the poets, disgrace themselves and deny God, in running down Pope, the most faultless of Poets, and almost of men....

"He is the moral poet of all civilisation; and as such, let us hope that he will be the national poet of all mankind. He is the only poet that never shocks; the only poet whose *faultlessness* has been made his reproach. Cast your eye over his productions; consider their extent, and contemplate their variety—pastoral, passion, mock heroic, translation, satire, ethics—all excellent, and often perfect."

Hazlitt, who doubted whether Pope was a poet, and considered him at best a poet of art, wrote in *Lectures on English Poets* (1818) :—

"The question, whether Pope was a poet, has hardly yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling; for if he was not a great writer, he must have been a great prose-writer, that is, he was a great writer of some sort. He was a man of exquisite faculties, and of the most refined taste, and as he chose verse (the most obvious distinction of poetry) as the vehicle to express his ideas, he has generally passed for a poet, and a good one. If indeed, by a great poet, we mean one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart, Pope was not in this sense a great poet; for the bent, the characteristic power of his mind, lay the clean contrary way; namely, in representing things as they appear to the indifferent observer, stripped of prejudice and passion, as in his Critical Essays; or in representing them

in the most contemptible and insignificant point of view, as in his Satires ; or in clothing the little with mock-dignity, as in his poems of Fancy ; or in adorning the utmost elegance of expression, and all the flattering illusions of friendship or self-love, as in his Epistles. He was not then distinguished as a poet of lofty enthusiasm, of strong imagination, with a passionate sense of the beauties of nature, or a deep insight into the workings of the heart ; but he was a wit, and a critic, a man of sense, of observation, and the world, with a keen elish of the elegances of art, or of nature when embellished by art, a quick tact for propriety of thought, and manners as established by the forms and customs of society, a refined sympathy with the sentiments and habitudes of human life, as he felt them within the little circle of his family and friends. He was in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art; and the distinction between the two, as well as I can make out, is this : The Poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of his passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men ; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature; to be identified with and to foreknow and to record the feelings of all men at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions ; and to exert the same power over the minds of his readers, that nature does. He sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they are ; he feels them in their universal interest, for he feels them as they affect the first principles of his and our common nature.

"Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class, or in the first rank of it. He saw nature only dressed by art ; he judged of beauty by fashion ; he sought for truth in the opinions of the world ; he judged of the feelings of others by his own. The capacious soul of Shakespeare had an intuitive and mighty sympathy with whatever could enter into the heart of man in all possible circumstances : Pope had an exact knowledge of all that he himself loved and hated, wished or wanted. Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth, through Chaos and old Night. Pope's muse never wandered with safety, but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto to his library back again. His mind dwelt with greater pleasure on his own garden, than on the garden of Eden ; he could describe the faultless whole length mirror that reflected his own

person, better than the smooth surface of the lake that reflects the face of heaven—a piece of cutglass or a pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect, than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun. In short, he was the poet of personality and of polished life. That which was nearest to him, was the greatest ; the fashion of the day bore sway in his mind over the immutable law of nature. He preferred the artificial to the natural in external objects, because he had a strong fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or proprietor of a gewgaw, than admiration of that which was interesting to all mankind. He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he could not grapple ; while he could trifle with the conventional and superficial modification of mere sentiment at will, laugh at or admire, put them on or off like a masquerade-dress, make much or little of them, indulge them for a longer or a shorter time as he pleased, and because while they amused his fancy and exercised his ingenuity, they never disturbed his vanity, his levity, or indifference. His mind was the antithesis of strength and grandeur ; its power was the power of indifference. He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry ; he was in poetry what the sceptic is in religion.

"It cannot be denied, that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing, than in aggrandizing objects; in checking, not in encouraging our enthusiasm; in sneering at the extravagances of fancy or passion, instead of giving a loose to them ; in describing a row of pins and needles, rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans.

"His muse was on a peace-establishment, and grew somewhat effeminate by long ease and indulgence. He lived in the smiles of fortune, and basked in the favours of the great. In his smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit ; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries ; its forked lightnings pointed sarcasms ; for 'the gnarled oak', he gives us 'the soft myrtle' ; for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plots, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills ; for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower-pot, or the fall of a china-jar ; for the tug and war of the elements, or the deadly strife of the passions, we have

> Calm contemplation and poetic ease.

Yet within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how

exquisite was contained ! What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiment !"

Modern critics are not so hard on Pope as the nineteenth century critics. The greatness of Pope as a poet is recognised in the present day, and his reputation after a long eclipse during the nineteenth century, has risen. For example Lytton Strachy writes in his book on Pope:

"Pope, we are told, was not only without 'high seriousness'; he lacked no less an 'adequate criticism of life'. What does this mean ? The phrase is ambiguous ; it at once signifies too much and too little. If we are to understand—as the context seems to imply—that in Mathew Arnold's opinion, no poetic criticism of life can be adequate unless it possesses largeness, freedom, and benignity, we must certainly agree that Pope's poetic criticism of life was far from adequate; for his way of writing was neither large nor free, and there was nothing benignant about him. But the words will bear another interpretation ; and in this sense it may turn out that Pope's poetic criticism of life was adequate to an extraordinary degree.

"Let us examine for a moment the technical instrument which Pope used—I mean the heroic couplet.

"Perhaps the most characteristic of all the elements in the couplet is antithesis. Ordinary regularity demands that the sense should end with every line—that was a prime necessity ; but a more scrupulous symmetry would require something more—a division of the line itself into two halves, whose meanings should correspond. And yet a further refinement was possible: each half might be again divided, and the corresponding division in two halves might be so arranged as to balance each other. The force of neatness could no further go ; and thus the most completely evolved type of heroic line is one composed of four main words arranged in pairs, so as to form a dozen antithesis.

Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike

is an example of such a line, and Pope's poems are full of them. With astonishing ingenuity he builds up these exquisite structures, in which the parts are so cunningly placed that they seem to interlock spontaneously, and, while they are all formed on a similar model, are yet so subtly adjusted that they produce a fresh pleasure

as each one appears. But that is not all. Pope was pre-eminently a satirist. He was naturally drawn to the contemplation of human beings, their conduct in society, their characters, their motives, their destinies ; and their feelings which these contemplations aroused in him were those of scorn and hatred. Civilisation illuminated by animosity—such was his theme; such was the passionate and complicated material from which he wove his pattern of balanced precision and polished clarity. Antithesis penetrates below the structure; it permeates the whole conception of his work. Fundamental opposites clash, and are reconciled. The profundities of persons, the futilities of existence, the rage and spite of genius—these things are mixed together, and pressed to our eyes in the shape of a Chinese box. The essence of all art is accomplished of the impossible. This cannot be done, we say ; and it *is* done. What has happened ? A magician has waved his wand. It is impossible that Pope should convey to us his withering sense of the wretchedness and emptiness of the fate of old women in society, in five lines, each containing four words, arranged in pairs so as to form a double antithesis. But the magician waves his hand, and there it is :

> See how the world its veterans rewards !
> A youth of frolics, an old age of cards ;
> Fair to no purpose, artful to no end,
> Young without lovers, old without a friend ;
> A fop their passion, but their prize a sot ;
> Alive ridiculous, and dead forgot ;

"And now, perhaps, we have discovered what may truly be said to have been Pope's 'poetic criticism of life'. His poetic criticism of life was, simply and solely the heroic couplet."

Now let us examine the main characteristics of Pope as a Poet :—

1. **Pope as a Classical Poet.** The chief characteristics of the classical period was the importance which the writers of this age gave to the art of writing poetry. They were no longer satisfied with putting down words on paper anyhow, provided they conveyed their meaning. They became conscious of the pleasure which sounds of the words can give when arranged in a particular manner. The public ear was also touched by the new harmony, and demanded its satisfaction from the writers of the age. A poem was not regarded as a good poem if it merely told a story with picturesque imagery; it had to be a composition in symmetry and good order. Condensation, terseness, neatness, finish—all qualities hitherto unheard of in

English—had to be studied. A good writer was supposed to please by his manner as well as his matter and no writer who neglected the graces of style could gain acceptance by the public.

Under the new standard that was set up in the classical period, it meant greatly increased labour on the part of the writer. The fastidiousness of the public ear did not appreciate "the mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease". Under the circumstances the prize could go to the writer who was willing to take most labour about his style. Pope from the very beginning of his literary career was most willing to do so. Even as a boy he took as his motto the advice of an elderly person, who used to tell him, "There was one way left of excelling; for though we had several great poets, we never had anyone great poet that was correct; and desired me to make that my study and aims".

It was on account of this quality of taking more pains than the other writers of the age that Pope took the lead in the race. His chief aim was to become a writer of finished verse, and in order to realise it he laboured day and night. He did not worry very much to improve his mind, to enlarge his view of the world or to store up knowledge. Though he was a voracious reader, and pursued his studies most assiduously, yet his chief interest lay in understanding and imitating the manner in which great writers of all ages expressed themselves. In his writings he was quite satisfied with second rate ideas, such as custom, chance, society or sect may suggest, but he would turn each idea over till it was reduced to its neatest and most epigrammatic expression.

The poets of the Classical period were pre-eminently literary artists and versifiers. They lacked in inspiration, lofty sentiment, the herioc soul, chivalrous devotion, the inner eye of the faith and, above all, love and sympathy. They also could not mean greatly. But all such meaning as they were capable of expressing they would do in the most terse, neat and polished language. They could express in one couplet all the meanings that their predecessors would express in a page. Pope was by far the most consummate of these masters of literary craft. He gave to the heroic couplet, as inherited from Dryden, a polish and balance which perfected its capacities of artistic expression.

In order to perfect his style Pope "played the sedulous ape" to the ancient writers of Greece and Rome, and quite a large part of his work consists of translation of Classics. He was full of admiration

for their art from the very beginning of his literary career. He strove to imitate Virgil and Homer in the external effects of diction and versification. *The Rape of the Lock* has been well called a "mosaic of quotations, parodies and allusions, derived from the masters of epic and narrative poetry." Fully to appreciate these allusions, would require a wider and more familiar knowledge of classical literature than most of the readers possess these days.

2. **Pope's Versifications.** Pope was the greatest artist in verse of his times. Even in his early composition, *Pastorals*, as Gosse puts it, "he introduced the new vein of harmony into English poetry. With his superior lightness of intellect, Pope moulded the heroic couplet more thoroughly to his purpose than Dryden ever did, first polishing it to the extreme mellifluousness, and then, touching it to ring and sparkle with the utmost rapidity and brilliance. There is no doubt that Pope lacks the literary gift which is so charming in Dryden, and so some critics have contrasted the smoothness and regularity of Pope's rhythms disadvantageously with the freedom and variety of Dryden's style. But they ignore altogether the different objects aimed at by each poet. Dryden's main object was to develop in English verse the colloquial principle which had been applied by succession of poets from Drayton downwards. His real strength lay in treating the heroic couplet as an instrument "fittest to discourse". As he was accustomed to converse in metre with public audience, he formed within the limits of the heroic couplet, rhythmical sentences which expressed his masculine and ardent genius.

Pope, on the contrary, in his early poems modified the heroic couplet by a large infusion of romantic and literary element though he by no means rejected entirely its heroic basis. Unlike Dryden, he was a stranger to the stage and being a lonely and reflective student who was more accustomed to holding conversation with books rather than men, tried to imitate in English the harmonies of the Latin poets whom he translated. Hence his verse acquired that imaginative tendency and musical effect which were lacking in Dryden.

Pope has been charged with monotony in his management of the heroic couplet. The surprising thing is that he should have achieved so much variety. "The heroic couplet", as Miss Edith Sitwell has pointed out in her book, *Alexander Pope*, "which is kept strictly within the limits of its outward structure, is as variable within those limits, as waves of wind, indeed, as variable as the earth itself,

with its mountains and plains, its snows and gardens, towers and gulfs. The reason why, to an insensitive ear, the heroic couplet seems monotonous, is because structure alone, and not texture, has been regarded as the maker of rhythm. In reality both are the parents of rhythm in poetry; and variations in speed are certainly the result, not only of structure, but also texture." Refuting the charge of monotony against Pope's verse she has brought out the difference between *The Rape of the Lock*, with its infinite variations, and *The Dunciad*, with its enormous variations of height and depth and speed. Regarding *The Rape of the Lock*, Miss Sitwell writes:—

"*The Rape of the Lock*, this miraculous poem, which has been described as a work in silver filigree, is light, variable, and enchanting as a little summer wind blowing down the golden spangles of the dew from the great faunal trees. The whole poem might have been woven by the air—thin golden fingers of Pope's sylphs. This thin and glittering texture, how did it ever come into being? The lines differ in no wise from the wings of the sylphs, as they float above the barge:

> Some to the sun their insect wings unfold,
> Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold;
> Transparent forms, too fine for mortal sight,
> Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light,
> Loose to the wind their airy garments flew,
> Thin glittering textures of the filmy dew,
> Dipped in the richest tincture of the skies,
> Where light disports in ever mingling dyes;
> While ev'ry beam new transient colours flings,
> Colours that change when'er they wave their wings.........

"*The Dunciad* is just as beautiful in its own way, and just as strange, as *The Ancient Mariner*. It has been held not to be, only because it is a satire, and people whose liking for poetry is a purely sentimental one, are unable to believe that beauty is not dependent upon subject alone. How enormous are the opening lines, with the thick, muffled thud of the alliterating M's:—

> The mighty mother, and her son, who brings
> The Smith field muses to the ears of kings.

The sound is thick, gross, and blind as stupidity itself. Then take the lines:

> Fate in their dotage this fair idiot gave,
> Gross as her sire, and as her mother grave,
> Laborious, heavy, busy, bold and blind,
> She rul'd in native anarchy, the mind.

"If we compare those varying lines with those I have quoted from *The Rape of the Lock*, I do not see how it is possible, for any but the most insensitive, to uphold that Pope is monotonous."

3. **Pope as a Satirist.** Pope was a moralist. He had no well-reasoned system of ethics, but he was quite entitled to claim that he "stooped to Truth, and moralis'd his song". He shared the current view that poetry was a great instrument of moral improvement and that its most effective method was that of satire, which by its ridicule destroyed corrupt customs and exposed the wicked. In him the quickly kindled anger of the satirist combined with an exceptionally delicate poetic sensibility. In fact satire was his element. Though his later poems are completely satirical, yet his earlier works, the *Essay on Criticism*, *The Rape of the Lock*, and the *Essay on Man* all alike bear witness to the satirical vein in the mind of Pope—the follies of poets and critics, the follies and foibles of women, the follies of men are his central theme.

In Pope's hands satire was a weapon against those whom his success and disabilities infuriated, and his enemies seem usually to have begun the game. As a Catholic he was in an uncertain position, and had few rights as a citizen. Therefore he was frequently on the defensive, and sometimes seemed to twist and turn like a hunted animal trying to escape. But he had the courage to do what he wanted to do, and often used desperately his only weapon, his pen, and he used it so effectively that he could hit his opponents so much more shrewdly than they knew how to hit him. He himself declared :—

> Satire's my weapon, but I'm too discreet
> To run amuck, and tilt at all I meet ;
> I only wear it in a land of Hectors,
> Thieves, Supercargoes, Sharpers, and Directors.

If he chastened fools beyond their deserts and upon trivial occasions, he also hated and scourged corruption in high places and struck as hard at the rulers of the land as at the pitiful poverty of the writers of those days. He was never afraid to

> Brand the bold front of shameless guilty men ;
> Dash the proud Gamester in his gilded car ;
> Bare the mean Heart that lurks beneath a *Star*.

And he was legitimately proud of his power to strike. So he declared :—

Yes, I am proud ; I must be proud to see
Men not afraid of God, afraid of me :
Safe from the Bar, the Pulpit, and the Throne,
Yet touch'd and sham'd by *Ridicule* alone,
O sacred weapon left for Truth's defence,
Sole dread of Folly, Vice, and Insolence.

"Unplac'd, unpensioned, no man's heir, or slave", Pope made no terms with what he found evil, and in a world, when most of authors depended on patronage, he kept his independence.

The Rape of the Lock is the finest example of Pope's satire. Warton remarked about this poem : "I hope it will not be thought an exaggerated panegyric to say that *The Rape of the Lock* is the best satire extant ; that it contains the truest and loveliest picture of modern life ; and that the subject is of a more elegant nature, as well as more artfully conducted than that of any other heroic-comic poem."

The Rape of the Lock is a vivid little picture of society, a more pointed expression of that attitude toward the "fair sex" which inspired all that Addison wrote on the subject in the *Spectator*. Even in its final form, when Pope introduced the machinery of the sylphs, gnomes, nymphs, etc., the mock-heroic element is not the predominant picture of the poem, but rather the brilliant picture of fashionable life—the lady's toilet, the voyage up the river, the coffee at Hampton Court, the game of ombre etc. The effect of the machinery is to heighten the irony, the satiric treatment of the fair sex. Here Pope makes use of his pointed style and finished versification to treat with airy contempt all the trivialities of fashionable life and the vagaries of the feminine mind.

Pope's satire differs from that of Dryden in this respect that whereas Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* is a poem against Shadwell, a lampoon (personal satire) making no pretension to a moral purpose, *The Rape of the Lock* is not a poem against anyone. In so far as it is a satire, it opposes not a person but a moral fault ; immoderate female pride. Its satire is not directed against Arabella Fermor but against weakness which she shares with half the world. Another difference is that whereas every line in *Mac Flecknoe* contributes to the humiliation of Shadwell, it is not true that every line in *The Rape of the Lock* satirises woman's folly. Whereas Dryden's object is to bring about the downfall of Shadwell, Pope's object is to conciliate everybody by means of mirth.

The Dunciad, another great satiric poem of Pope, was written by him with the motive of satirising the incompetence in matter of

'wit', and taste of the official mind—whether that of the city of London in choosing their City Poet, or that of the Government in the choice of a Laureate. Like Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*, *The Dunciad* also describes the succession of one dunce to another on the throne of Dullness, but Pope's object is not identical with Dryden's—attack on a personal enemy by means of ridicule. After the description of Theobold sitting foolishly on an immense throne in the opening lines of the book, he is relegated to the position of a mere spectator for the rest of Book II, which is devoted to satirising not only Theobold, but a host of bad writers, ignorant patrons, and unscrupulous publishers. In fact *The Dunciad* is not only an attack on bad writers and bad writing, it is Pope's pessimistic commentary on an important development of the civilisation of his time. It is a bitter protest against the levelling down of literary standards.

4. **Pope as the Poet of Peace.** In his book, *Laureate of Peace*, Prof. Wilson Knight has very successfully established his thesis that Pope is primarily the poet of peace. He was the supreme poet of that period in English history which was characterised by peace and harmony, and he gave that peace and harmony a perfect artistic shape. The book opens with the significant remark : "At the start of the eighteenth century a new way of life was being established in England. The fruits of the Revolution were maturing. Under Queen Anne party politics were getting, if at first rather unsteadily, into their stride, as a safeguard against bloodier methods; new classes were rising rapidly to education, power, and prestige ; there was peace and renewal after distraction and unrest. The age of Anne recaptured, in its own fashion, something of that assurance, and more than something of the harmony of the age of Elizabeth. Its poet was Pope : 'Be mine the blessings of a peaceful reign', thus he wrote in *Windsor Forest*."

A careful study of Pope's works reveals that peace, harmony balance and poise are their very bases. In his first poetic work, *Pastorals*, he creates a poise by balancing man against nature, love against death, reason with reason, in spite of man's pains and problems. In his next poem, *Messiar*, Pope prophesies a golden age. The Saviour (Christ) crushed death and Hell and tends men as a loving 'shepherd'. Wars are gone :—

> No more shall nation against nation rise,
> Nor ardent warriors meet with hateful eyes,
> Nor fields with gleaming steel be covered o'er
> The brazen trumpets kindle rage no more.

In *Windsor Forest* Britain is regarded as the enemy of oppression, peace is invoked by Father Thames :

> Hail, sacred peace, hail, long expected days,
> That Thames' glory to the stars shall raise !

The theme of *The Rape of the Lock* is a social quarrel and its moral is the futility of ill-temper. The poet assumes an aristocratic peaceful society ; and wars, politics and social injustice are not relevant. In this satire, as in others, Pope speaks of man removed, as in pastoral poetry, from natural hardship, strenuous labour, and social unrest.

In *Eloisa to Abeland*, the full dramatic exploitation of the love torment is most beautifully balanced with divine love. It recalls the balancing of human and divine love and beauty in Spenser's four *Hymns*. *The Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* offers a fine treatment of the unrestful ambition as "the glorious faults of angels and God's balanced against a denunciation of 'steel' sympathies, unyielding hearts, and the short-lived and brittle pageantry of the mighty "proud", and concluding

> So perish all, whose breasts n'er learned to glow
> For others' good, or melt at others' woe.

This poise or balance is also the chief characteristic of Pope's versification. In this connection Prof. Knight has observed :

"In him we find a clear sense of opposition and balance, as with the two halves of his regularly divided line units and of rhymed couplet itself. Each line and couplet is in itself a balanced unit. His verse paragraphs are also units, succeeding each other, as, pre-eminently, in *Eliosa to Abeland*, in alternate, balanced pieces, like a graceful walk...As a result we have poise and grace, rather than control (as in Milton), and this is what we mean, or should mean, whenever we think or talk of peace."

CHAPTER VII

THE PRE-ROMANTICS

The later half of the eighteenth century, which was dominated by Dr. Samuel Johnson, is called the *Age of Johnson*. Johnson died in 1784, and from that time the classical spirit in English literature began to give place to the Romantic spirit, though officially the Romantic Age started from the year 1798 when Wordsworth and Coleridge published the famous *Lyrical Ballads*. Even during the Age of Johnson which was predominantly classical, cracks had begun to appear in the solid wall of classicism and there were clear signs of revolt in favour of the Romantic spirit. This was especially noticeable in the field of poetry. Most of the poets belonging to the Age of Johnson may be termed as the precursors of the Romantic Revival. That is why the Age of Johnson is called the *Age of Transition* in English poetry. Its history is the history of the struggle between the old and the new, and of the gradual triumph of the new.

The greatest protagonist of classicism during this period was **Dr. Johnson** himself, and he was supported by Goldsmith. In the midst of changes these two held fast to the classical ideas, and the creative work of both of them in the field of poetry was imbued with the classical spirit. As Macaulay said, "Dr. Johnson took it for granted that the kind of poetry which flourished in his own time and which he had been accustomed to hear praised from his childhood, was the best kind of poetry, and he not only upheld its claims by direct advocacy of its canons, but also consistently opposed every experiment in which, as in the ballad, he detected signs of revolt against it. Johnson's two chief poems, *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, are classical on account of their didacticism, their formal, rhetorical style, and their adherence to the closed couplet.

Goldsmith was equally convinced that the classical standards of writing poetry were the best and that they had attained perfection during the Augustan Age. All that was required of the poets was to imitate those standards. According to him "Pope was the limit of classical literature". In his opposition to the blank verse, Goldsmith showed himself fundamentally hostile to change. His two

important poems, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*, which are versified pamphlets on political economy, are classical in spirit and form. They are written in the closed couplet, are didactic, and have pompous phraseology. These poems may be described as the last great work of the outgoing, artificial eighteenth century school, though even in them, if we study them minutely, we perceive the subtle touches of the new age of Romanticism especially in their treatment of nature and rural life.

Before we consider the poets of the Age of Transition, who broke from the classical tradition and followed the new Romantic trends, let us first examine what Romanticism stood for. For instance, the main characteristics of classical poetry were : (*i*) it was mainly the product of intelligence and was especially deficient in emotion and imagination ; (*ii*) it was chiefly the town poetry ; (*iii*) it had no love for the mysterious, the supernaturnal, or what belonged to the dim past ; (*iv*) its style was formal and artificial ; (*v*) it was written in the closed couplet ; (*vi*) it was fundamentally didactic ; (*vii*) it insisted on the writer to follow the prescribed rules and imitate the standard models of good writing. The new poetry which showed romantic leanings was opposed to all these points. For instance, its chief characteristics were : (*i*) it encouraged emotion, passion and imagination in place of dry intellectuality ; (*ii*) it was more interested in nature and rustic life rather than in town life ; (*iii*) it revived the romantic spirit—love of the mysterious, the supernatural, the dim past , (*iv*) it opposed the artificial and formal style, and insisted on simple and natural forms of expression ; (*v*) it attacked the supremacy of the closed couplet and encouraged all sorts of metrical experiments ; (*vi*) its object was not didactic but the expression of the writer's experience for its own sake ; (*vii*) it believed in the liberty of the poet to choose the theme and the manner of his writing.

The poets who showed romantic leaning during the Age of Johnson, and who may be described as the precursors or harbingers of the Romantic Revival were **James Thomson, Thomas Gray, William Collins, James Macpherson, William Blake, Robert Burns, William Cowper** and **George Crabbe.**

James Thomson (1700-1748) was the earliest eighteenth century poet who showed romantic tendency in his work. The main romantic characteristic in his poetry is his minute observation of nature. In *The Seasons* he gives fine sympathetic description of the fields,

the woods, the streams, the sky and wild creatures. Instead of the closed couplet, he follows the Miltonic tradition of using the blank verse. In *The Castle of Indolence*, which is written in the form of dream allegory so popular in medieval literature, Thomson uses the Spenserian stanza. Unlike the didactic poetry of the Augustans, the poem is full of dim suggestions.

James Macpherson (1736-1796) became the most famous poet during his time by the publication of Ossianic poems, called the *Works of Ossian*, which were translations of Gaelic folk literature, though the originals were never produced, and so he was considered by some critics as a forger. In spite of this Macpherson exerted a considerable influence on contemporary poets like Blake and Burns by his poetry which was impregnated with moonlight melancholy and ghostly romantic suggestions.

William Blake (1757-1827). In the poetry of Blake we find a complete break from classical poetry. In some of his works as *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* which contain the famous poems—*Little Lamb, who made Thee ?* and *Tiger, Tiger, burning bright*, we are impressed by their literary quality. In other poems such as *The Book of Thel*, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, it is the prophetic voice of Blake which appeals to the reader. In the words of Swinburne, Blake was the only poet of "supreme and simple poetic genius" of the eighteenth century, "the one man of that age fit, on all accounts, to rank with the old great masters." Some of his lyrics are, no doubt, the most perfect and the most original songs in the English language.

Robert Burns (1759-96), who is the great song writer in the English language, had great love for nature, and a firm belief in human dignity and quality, both of which are characteristics of romanticism. He summed up his poetic creed in the following stanza :

> Give me a spark of Nature's fire,
> That is all the learning I desire;
> Then, though I trudge through dub and mire
> At plough or cart,
> My Muse, though homely in attire,
> May touch the heart.

The fresh, inspired songs of Burns as *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, *To a Mouse*, *To a Mountain Daisy*, *Man was Made to Mourn* go straight to the heart, and they seem to be the songs of birds in spring time after the cold and formal poetry for about a century. Most of his songs have the Elizabethan touch about them.

William Cowper (1731-1800), who lived a tortured life and was driven to the verge of madness, had a genial and kind soul. His poetry, much of which is of autobiographical interest, describes the homely scenes and pleasures and pains of simple humanity—the two important characteristics of romanticism. His longest poem, *The Task*, written in blank verse, comes as a relief after reading the rhymed essays and the artificial couplets of the Age of Johnson. It is replete with descriptions of homely scenes, of woods and brooks of plaoghmen and shepherds. Cowper's most laborious work is the translation of Homer in blank verse, but he is better known for his small, lovely lyrics like *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture*, beginning with the famous line, 'Oh, that those lips had language', and *Alexander Selkrik*, beginning with the oft-quoted line, 'I am monarch of all I survey'.

George Crabbe (1754-1832) stood midway between the Augustans and the Romantics. In form he was classical, but in the temper of his mind he was romantic. Most of his poems are written in the heroic couplet, but they depict an attitude to nature, which is Wordsworthian. To him nature is a "presence, a motion and a spirit", and he realises the intimate union of nature with man. His well-known poem, *The Village*, is without a rival as a picture of the working men of his age. He shows that the lives of the common villagers and labourers are full of romantic interest. His later poems, *The Parish Registers*, *The Borough*, *Tales in Verse*, and *Tales of the Hall* are all written in the same strain.

Another poet who may also be considered as the precursor of the Romantic Revival was **Thomas Chatterton** (1752-70), the Bristol boy, whose *Rowley Poems*, written in pseudo-Chaucerian English made a strong appeal of medievalism. The publication of **Bishop Percy's** *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* in 1765 also made great contribution to the romantic mood reviving interest in ballad literature.

GRAY and COLLINS

Among the precursors of the Romantic Revival, **Gray** and **Collins** are given a higher place. These two poets, who never formed a "school", and who never even knew each other, are closely linked together in critical history because of their reaction against the dominant 'school of Pope' at very much the same time and in the same general direction.

Thomas Gray (1716—1771) is famous as the author of *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, "the best-known in the English language". Unlike classical poetry which was characterised by restraint on personal feelings and emotions, this poem is the manifestation of deep feelings of the poet. It is suffused with the melancholy spirit which is a characteristic romantic trait. It contains deep reflections of the poet on the universal theme of death which spares no one. Other important poems of Gray are *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard*. Of these *The Bard* is more original and romantic. It emphasises the independence of the poet, which became the chief characteristic of romantic poetry. All these poems of Gray follow the classical model so far as form is concerned, but in spirit they are romantic.

It was but natural that Gray's poetry which was opposed to the classical spirit was met with severe opposition by the supporters of classicism. Dr. Johnson wrote in his *Life of Gray* (1781) :—

"Gray's poetry is now to be considered, and I hope not to be looked on as an enemy to his name, if I confess that I contemplate it with less pleasure than his life.

"His *Ode on Spring* has something poetical, both in the language and the thought; but the language is too luxuriant, and the thoughts have nothing new...

"The poem on the *Cat* was doubtless by its author considered as a trifle, but it is not a happy trifle...

"The *Prospect of Eton College* suggests nothing to Gray, which every beholder does not equally think and feel. His supplication to father *Thames*, to tell him who drives the hoops or tosses the ball, is useless and puerile. Father *Thames* has no better means of knowing than himself.

"I am not one of those who are willing to be pleased, and therefore would gladly find the meaning of the first stanza of *The Progress of Poetry*.

"I do not see that *The Bard* promotes any truth, moral or political.

"These odes are marked by glittering accumulations of ungraceful ornaments; they strike, rather than please ; the images are magnified by affectation ; the language is laboured into harshness. The mind of the writer seems to work with unnatural violence. *Double, double, toil and trouble.* He has a kind of strutting dignity, and is tall

by walking on tiptoe. His art and his struggle are too visible and there is too little appearance of ease and nature.

"To say that he has no beauties, would he unjust : a man like him, of great learning and great industry, could not but produce something valuable. When he pleases best, it can only he said that a good design was ill directed.

"His translations of Northern and Welsh poetry deserve praise; the imagery is preserved, perhaps imported; but the language is unlike the language of other poets.

"In the character of his *Elegy* I rejoice to concur with the common reader ; for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinement of subtility and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours. The *Churchyard* abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas beginning *Yet even these bones*, are to me original : I have never seen the notions in any other place ; yet he that reads them here, persuades himself that he has always felt them. Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him."

Some of the contemporary critics who welcomed the new trends in poetry, objected to the condemnation of Gray's poetry by Dr. Johnson. For example, Potter in his *An Inquiry into Some Passages of Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets* (*1783*) wrote :

"The wild and romantic scenery, the strength of conception, the boldness of the figures, the terrible sublimity, the solemn spirit of prophecy, and the animated glow of visions of glory render the *Bard* 'the finest Ode in the world'. The language of Gray is always pure, peculiarly compact and nervous, ever appropriated to his subject ; when that is gay and smiling, his diction is elegant and glittering ; in the sober reflections of saintly melancholy it is grave and solemn ; and it rises with an elevated dignity along with the boldest flights of his sublime imagination ; and his numbers, regulated by a fine taste and a nice ear, have through all their various modulations rich and copious harmony.

"What could induce Dr. Johnson, who as a good man might be expected to favour goodness, as a scholar to be candid to a man of learning, to attack this excellent person and poet with such outrage and indecency, we can only conjecture from this observation, 'there

must be a certain sympathy between the book and the reader to create a good liking.' Now it is certain that the critic has nothing of this sympathy, no portion nor sense of that etherial flame which animates the poet ; he is therefore as little qualified to judge of these works of imagination, as the shivering inhabitant of the caverns of the North to form an idea of the glowing sun that flames over the plains of Chili."

During the Romantic period, Gray's poetry naturally received the praise it deserved. Wordsworth in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800) remarked : "Gray was at the head of those who, by their reasonings, have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical composition, and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction."

Hazlitt in his *Lectures on English Poets* (1818) remarked : "I cannot easily give up, nor will the world be in any haste to part with his *Elegy in a Country Church-yard* : it is one of the most classical productions that ever was penned by a refined and thoughtful mind, moralising on human life."

The Victorian critics arrived at a more sober and balanced appraisal of Gray's poetry. For example, Matthew Arnold in his essay, *Thomas Gray* (1880), wrote :

"In a poet of such magnitude, how shall we explain his scantiness of production ? Shall we explain it by saying that to make of Gray a poet of this magnitude is absurd ; that his genius and resources were small, and that his production, therefore, was small also, but that the popularity of a single Elegy—a popularity due in great measure to the subject—created for Gray a reputation to which he has really no right ?

"Gray himself, however, maintained that the *Elegy* was not his best work in poetry, and he was right. High as is the praise due to the *Elegy*, it is yet true that in other productions of Gray he exhibits poetical qualities even higher than those exhibited in the *Elegy*. He deserves, therefore, his extremely high reputation as a poet, although his critics and the public may not always have praised him with perfect judgment. We are brought back, then, to the question : How in a poet so really considerable, are we to explain his scantiness of production ?

"The reason, the indubitable reason I cannot but think it, I have already given elsewhere. Gray, a born poet, fell upon an age

of prose. He fell upon an age whose task was such as to call forth in general men's powers of understanding, wit and cleverness, rather than their deepest powers of mind and soul. As regards literary production, the task of the eighteenth century in England was not the poetic interpretation of the world, its task was to create a plain, straightforward, efficient prose. Poetry obeyed the bent of mind requisite for the due fulfilment of this task of the century. It was intellectual, argumentative, ingenious, not seeing things in their truth and beauty, not interpretative. Gray, with the qualities of mind and soul of a genuine poet, was isolated in his century. Maintaining them and fortifying them by solid studies, he yet could not fully educe and enjoy them ; the want of a genial atmosphere, the failure of sympathy in his contemporaries, were too great.

"Gray's production was scanty, and scanty, as we have seen, it could not but be. Even what he produced is not always pure in diction, true in evolution. Still, with whatever drawbacks, he is alone, or almost alone (for Collins has something of the like merit) in his age. Gray said himself that 'the style he aimed at was extreme consciousness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous, and musical'. Compared, not with the work of the great masters of the golden ages of poetry, but with the poetry of his own contemporaries in general, Gray may be said to have reached, in style, the excellence at which he aimed ; while the evolution also of such a piece as his *Progress of Poesy* must be accounted not less noble and sound than its style."

Now let us examine the important characteristics of Gray as a poet :

1. **Gray's Classicism** :—Though Romantic tendencies are manifest in the later poetry of Gray, and for this reason he is regarded by some critics as the precursor of the Romantic Movement, and as a poet who was far in advance of his age ; other critics, with equal emphasis, consider him as a truly classical poet representing in himself all the main characteristics of the Augustan Age. Even Phelps, who most vehemently has advanced the plea of placing Gray in the direct lineage of modern Romanticism, admits that in the early poems Gray was a classicist and a disciple of Dryden. Bell in his introduction to the Poems of Gray ridicules those critics who look upon Gray as a romantic :

"By these writers a great deal of play is made with the facts that in his earlier poetry Gray turned from the pseudo-classic satire

of urban and social life to find his inspiration in solitude and contemplation, and that for the subject-matter of his later poetry he went to the mythology of the Celtic and Scandanavian races and to the history of the despised and neglected 'Dark Ages'. That he did so does not lack significance. The *Elegy* and other poems do indicate, of course, hardly a revolt from, but at least a weariness of the subject-matter in which our typical Augustans has delighted. An unprejudiced examination of them does, however, seem to the present writer to manifest how much more closely Gray is related to the pseudo-classical predecessors than to the romantics of the succeeding generations."

In point of poetic diction also Bell regards Gray as adhering to the classical tradition : "In his general choice and employment of language also Gray holds rather to the Classical rather than to the Romantic tradition, or is Romantic only very tentatively and in fashion of his own. Language to him, one feels, was very little more than the medium by which his thought was to be expressed. He valued it for its clarity, its transparency, but he did not value it for itself, for its connotative power, its individual colour. The best language to him was that which gave the thought with the least confusion and friction...It is never distinguished by what we may call 'the Romantic surcharge', that elusive and mysterious quality which gives to single lines and phrases of Keats or Wordsworth or Coleridge a meaning wider and deeper than actually expressed by the words employed, yet we feel to be result of some unsizable magic in their choice and arrangement."

And finally Bell points out that Gray was lacking in the fundamental characteristic of Romantic poets *i.e.*, in their love for the freedom of the individual and their hatred of tyranny as embodied in the French Revolution :—

"As we have suggested, however, the true Romantic Revival was not principally or essentially a revival of interest in things medieval at all. Its impulse and its character were given to it much more, and more directly, by the individualistic ideal which lay behind the French Revolution, and by a consequent renaissance of the sense of wonder over the life of here and now, of reverent sympathy with the passion and emotions of man as man irrespective of class and education. The apparently humble and commonplace took on an air of mystery to eyes aware that nothing was to be counted common or unclean and needed no longer to be disguised in

elaborate periphrases or ignored as unworthy of poetic attention. In all this Gray by the very condition of his art could have no share, to it could impart no direction. His mind for good or evil, was of an elder day, and had he lived to such an old age as to see the Revolution and its literary first fruits, he would only have found in them a justification of his distrust of Voltaire, and Rousseau."

Lord David Cecil in his book, *Poets and Story-Tellers,* also considers Gray as fundamentally a Classical poet in all aspects. He looks upon him as "a typical eighteenth century scholar-artist with a peculiarly intense response to the imaginative appeal of the past, and whose pervading temper was a sober melancholy." Though Gray's considered view of life was melancholy, it was different from the out-and-out pessimism of the Romantics, as his temperamental outlook was qualified by the profoundly moral attitude of the age in which he lived. His peculiarly religious convictions softened his melancholy which he called "white melancholy," as distinguished from "black melancholy", which excludes and shuts its eyes to the most possible hopes, and everything that is pleasurable." His view of poetry as expressed in his *Progress of Poesy* is also far from that of the Romantic poets. Unlike Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn,* Gray's poem does not give us a vision of art as an expression of ultimate spiritual reality, where "Truth is Beauty, and Beauty Truth." Like any sensible gentleman of the eighteenth century, Gray considered poetry as a useful and educative art whose primary aim was to give pleasure and assuage the frayed nerves of man."

2. **Gray as a Romantic Poet.** In spite of some critics' emphasis on Gray's Classicism, there is no doubt that in Gray's poetry, especially the latter part of it, there are certain characteristics which are fundamentally romantic, on account of which he has been placed by some critics early in the direct lineage of modern Romanticism. Phelps, in his book, *The Beginning of the English Romantic Movement,* is of the opinion that the early romantic movement was exemplified in Gray. There he writes :—

"Although Gray's biographers and critics have very seldom spoken of it, the most interesting thing in a study of his poetry is his steady progress in the direction of Romanticism. His early poems contain nothing Romantic ; his *Elegy* has something of the Romantic mood, but shows many conventional touches ; in the Pindaric Odes the Romantic feeling asserts itself boldly ; and he ends in enthusiastic study of Norse and Celtic poetry and mythology. Such a steady

growth in the mind of the greatest poet of the time shows not only what he learned from the age, but what he taught it. Gray is a much more important factor in the Romantic movement than seems to be commonly supposed."

Gray's Odes—*On the Spring, On a Distant Prospect of Eton College,* and *To Adversity*—which he wrote in 1742, have nothing of the spirit of Romanticism. They seem to be the genuine products of the Augustan Age. But his *Elegy*, which he finished in 1750, though not a romantic poem, is certainly romantic in its *mood*. In fact it marks the transition from his period of Classicism, to his more highly imaginative poetry. The *Elegy* follows the melancholy school of English poetry which was started by Milton's *Il Penseroso* and which exerted a great influence on the growth of the Romantic Movement. As Phelps has pointed out, there is one very significant fact about the composition of the *Elegy*, which clearly shows the change that was coming on the mind of the poet at this period of transition. One of the most famous stanzas of the poem was written originally by Gray as follows :—

Some village Cato with dauntless Breast
The little Tyrant of his Fields withstood ;
Some mute inglorious Tully here may rest ;
Some Caesar, guiltless of his Country's Blood.

But afterwards Gray removed the Latin names and inserted in their places the names of Hampden, Milton, Cromwell, belonging to contemporary and recent English history. Commenting on this factor Phelps remarks: "It marks the transition from Classicism to Nationalism. In this stanza be shook off the shackles of pseudo-classicism; he made up his mind that English historical examples were equal in dignity to those taken from Latin literature. It was a long step forward, and although perhaps a small thing in itself, is an index to a profound change going on in Gray's mind."

Gray's next work which was printed in 1757, and which included his two Pindaric Odes—*The Progress of Poesy*, and *The Bard*, show him well on his way towards Romanticism. In these Odes, Gray ceased following the beaten track of Augustan poetry, and struck out ahead of it. So much so that from this time people began to look upon him as a Romanticist and expected some wild and extravagant productions from his pen. Dr. Johnson perceiving the influence of Gray on the readers on account of his romantic tendencies, felt naturally offended and declared in his characteristic tone that the admiration for Gray was all hypocrisy.

In 1755 Gray became interested in Northern mythology, which he studied with great enthusiasm. Under its influence he wrote in 1761, *The Fatal Sisters, From the Norse Tongue*, and *The Descent of Odin*. Being stirred by Evan's book on Welsh poetry, the *Specimens*, he wrote in 1764 *The Triumph of Owen*. All these poems are distinctly Romantic. Moreover, Gray began taking a very keen and sympathetic interest in the poets who were heralding the new age of Romanticism. When Ossian's *Fragments* appeared in 1760, Gray welcomed the new form of poetry.

The Classicists had no love for wild nature. Addison's remark: "My head is still giddy with mountains and precipices ; and you can't imagine how much I am pleased with the sight of a plain," is illustrative of the contempt for mountains, which were considered as wild, barbaric and useless. But in Gray's letters we hear the Romantic tone. Mitford remarked : "No man was a greater admirer of nature than Mr. Gray, nor admired with better taste."

Taking into account all these characteristics of Gray, Phelps establishes the point that the early Romantic movement in England was examplified in Gray : "It is interesting to notice the strange and strong contrast between the shy, reserved temperament of Gray and the pronounced radicalism of his literary taste. Had he been a demonstrative and gushing personality like Mason, his utterances about mountains and Ossianic poetry would not seem so singular ; but that this secluded scholar, who spent most of his hours over his book in Cambridge and the manuscripts in the British Museum, and who was always slow to speak, should have quietly cultivated tastes so distinctly Romantic—this is a noteworthy fact. It seems to show that the one-man power counts for something in literary developments. Gray influenced the age more than the age influenced him : he led rather than followed. In addition to all the various forces that we have observed as silently working in the Romantic movement, we must add the direct influence of the courage and genius of Gray."

William Collins (1721-1759). Like the poetry of Gray, Collins's poetry exhibits deep feelings and especially the feeling of melancholy. His first poem, *Oriental Eclogues*, is romantic in feeling, but is written in the closed couplet. His best-known poems are the Odes, *To Simplicity*, *To Fear*, *To the Passions*, the small lyric *How Sleep the Brave*, and the beautiful "Ode to Evening". In all these poems the poet values the solitude and quietude because they afford

opportunity for contemplative life. Collins in his poetry advocates return to nature and simple and unsophisticated life, which became the fundamental creeds of the Romantic Revival.

Like Gray, Collins also was severely criticised by Dr. Johnson, who did not find any remarkable thing in his poetry. In his *Life of Collins* (1781) Johnson remarked : "The grandeur of wildness, and the novelty of extravagance, were always desired by him, but were not always attained. Yet as diligence is never wholly lost, if his efforts sometimes caused harshness and obscurity they likewise produced in happier moments sublimity and splendour. This idea which he had formed of excellence, led him to oriental fictions and allegorical imagery ; and perhaps, while he was intent upon description, he did not sufficiently cultivate sentiment. His poems are the productions of a mind not deficient in fire, nor unfurnished with knowledge either of books or life, but somewhat obstructed in its progress by deviation in quest of mistaken beauties......his diction was often harsh, unskilfully laboured, and injudiciously selected. He affected the obsolete when it was not worthy of revival ; and he puts his words out of the common order, seeming to think, with some later candidates for fame, that not to write prose is certainly to write poetry. His lines commonly are of slow motion, clogged and impeded with clusters of consonants. As men are often esteemed who cannot be loved, so the poetry of Collins may sometimes extort praise when it gives little pleasure."

In the nineteenth century, however, with the change of literary taste, the merit of Collins's poetry was recognised. In 1814 Mitford wrote : "About ten years before this time, the Odes of Collins were published, and received with the most unmerited neglect. The public had been so long delighted with the wit and satire of Pope, had formed their taste so much on his manner of versification, and had been so accustomed to dwell upon the neat, pointed, and energetic style of that finished writer, that they were but ill-prepared to admire the beauties of lofty and magnificent language, in which Collins arrayed his sublime conception, and which must have been tasteless to those, who but a few years before had received the last book of the *Dunciad*, from the dying hands of their favourite poet ; and who could not pass from wit, epigram, and satire, to the bold conceptions, and wild grandeur of a poet, who imitated with signal success, the sublime compositions of Aeschylus. The very works which have now raised Gray and Collins to the rank of our two greatest lyrical poets, were either

neglected, or ridiculed by their contemporaries ; while, to appreciate the justness of their thoughts, the harmony of their numbers, and the splendid creations of their genius, was left for the mature and almost unerring decisions of time."

Hazlitt in his *Lectures on English Poets* (1818) observed : "Collins had that genuine inspiration, which alone can give birth to the highest efforts of poetry. He leaves stings in the minds of his readers, certain traces of thought and feelings which never wear out, because nature had left them in his own mind. He is the only one of the minor poets of whom, if he had lived, it cannot be said that he might not have done the greatest things. The germ is there. He is sometimes affected, unmeaning and obscure; but he also catches rich glimpses of the bowers of the Paradise, and has lofty aspirations after the highest seats of the Muses. With a great deal of tinsel and splendid patch-work, he has not been able to hide the solid sterling ore of genius. In his best works there is an attic simplicity, a pathos, and a fervour of imagination, which make up the more lament that the efforts of his mind were at first depressed by neglect and pecuniary embarrassment, and at length buried in the gloom of unconquerable and fatal malady...

"Perhaps his *Ode on the Poetical Character* is the best of all. A rich distilled perfume emanates from it like the breath of genius; a golden cloud envelops it; a honeyed paste of poetic diction encrusts it. His *Ode to Evening* shows equal genius in the images and versification. The sounds steal slowly over the ear, like the gradual coming on of evening itself."

Campbell in *Specimens* (1819) wrote: "Collins published his *Oriental Eclogues* while at college, and his lyrical poetry at the age of twenty-six. Those works will abide comparison with whatever Milton wrote under the age of thirty. If they have rather less exuberant wealth of genius, they exhibit more exquisite touches of genius. Like Milton, he leads us into the haunted ground of imagination, like him, he has the rich economy of expression haloed with thought, which by single or few words often hints entire pictures to the imagination....

"In his *Ode to Fear* he hints at his dramatic ambition, and he planned several tragedies. Had he lived to enjoy and adorn existence, it is not easy to conceive his sensitive spirit and harmonious ear descending to mediocrity in any path of poetry; yet it may be doubted if his mind had not a passion for the visionary and remote forms of imagination too strong and exclusive for the general purposes of the drama. His genius loved to breathe rather in the preternatural

and ideal element of poetry, than in the atmosphere of imitation, which lies closest to real life'; and his notions of poetical excellence, whatever vows he might address to the manners, were still tending to the vast, the undefinable and the abstract. Certainly, however, he carried sensibility and tenderness into the highest regions of abstracted thought; his enthusiasm spreads a glow even amongst 'the shadowy tribes of mind', and his allegory is as sensible to the heart as it is visible to the fancy."

Collins continues to enjoy poetic reputation in the twentieth century. Murry in his *The Poetry of Collins* (1921) remarked: "If at this point we are to be scrupulously just to Collins, we must recognise in his work a sensibility overweighed from the beginning by a precocious literary instinct. The very perfection of the two school-boy poems that have come down to us—'Young Damon of the vale is dead' and 'When Phoebe formed a wanton smile'—is disturbing, for they show that the aesthetic impulse had reached the highest point of acuteness long before the sensibility could have established any real contact with experience at all. These two poems are not excellent imitations; they are perfect achievements.

"If we put the evidence of this altogether precocious sense of form together with the self-conscious literary impulse which reveals itself in the majority of Odes, we see Collins as a man prematurely burdened with the gift of deliberate poetic expression, one whose sensibility could hardly have failed to be deadened by the aesthetic preoccupation interposed between it and direct experience. He was prevented from feeling by the impatience of his intense desire to feel.

"To expound the beauties of the *Ode to Evening* is superfluous. It is a perfect and great poem. For the one and only time Collins', sensibility was brought into direct contact with a profound experience; for the only and only time he had a deep and peculiar emotion to recollect in tranquillity, on the embodiment of which he could fully lavish his art. He had no need to fear the remembered beauties of other poets, for on this occasion the content of his own mind was definite and urgent enough to compel them to submit to his purpose, to abandon their own allegiance and accept his own."

Let us now examine the important characteristics of Collins as a poet:—

1. **Collins as the Precursor of the Romantic Movement.** Collins is considered as an early and influential harbinger of English

Romanticism. Though in his verse we find the perfect finish and grace of Greek form, which is the chief characteristic of classicism, yet in sentiment his place is among the young Romanticists, and like them, he was strongly influenced by Milton. In his first poetical production, *Persian Eclogues*, which he wrote in 1742, he does not exhibit any remarkable Romantic feeling, and they are written in the heroic couplet. But in his next poetic venture—*Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegoric Subjects*, we discover a sure Romantic flavour. In those odes we find him imitating Shakespeare and Spenser, of whom he was a great admirer, as well as Milton whose influence is visible in his great fondness for personified abstractions, and in occasional phrases as "Play with the tangles of her hair" in the *Ode to Liberty*.

Collins's beautiful *Ode to Evening* is wholly romantic in mood. Written in a melancholy style of Milton's *Il Penseroso*, so dear to Romantics, it displays that love for the simple objects of nature, which is another main characteristic of Romantic poetry. The first line recalls young Milton in *Lycidas*, while the phrase, "The bat's short shrill shriek", is to be heard as though Spenser was standing beside the newcomer to his poetry. The "folding-star", and the "Calm votaress" remind us of Milton's *Comus*. The elves who slept in the flower seem to belong to the underwoods of Shakespeare. The poem is written also in the rhymeless stanza which had been practised by Milton. So in this poem we hear the echoes of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton, who exerted a considerable influence on the Romantic poets.

Collins' *Ode on the Poetical Character* has a truly romantic flavour, while his *Ode on the Death of Thomson* shows a fine appreciation of the poet of nature. His *Ode on Simplicity* is written in the form which Milton used for his Christmas hymn. But his *Ode on Scottish Superstitions*, which is his most significant poem, clearly shows that Collins was steadily gravitating in the direction of Romanticism, and if he had enjoyed good health, he might have played an important part in the Romantic movement. This poem is in subject, treatment and style distinctly romantic.

Another characteristic, peculiarly romantic, which is found in Collins is his love of liberty, and hatred of all oppression. He was the first English poet, after Milton, to blow again the clarion of republican faith and freedom. Like Milton, Burns and Shelley, he too is the champion of the freedom of the oppressed, and an oppo-

nent of tyranny of every sort. Another link which Collins has with Milton, Shelley and Wordsworth is the melancholy note found in his elegy—*Ode on the Death of Thomson.*

2. **Collins's Classicism.** In the poems of Collins we discover two distinct aspects—the Romantic and the Classical. Whatever he expressed as an individual was Romantic, but he could not escape the tendencies of his age, and whenever he came down to the commonplace, the Classicism of his age inevitably intruded itself.

The classicism of Collins is clearly manifest in his Eclogues. In them we find unmistakably the Collins of the hour—the classicist, almost unrelieved by a single exhibition of individual poetic quality, which, in other words, we can call Romantic. Eastern apologues in prose or verse had been made popular by Addison, and while writing these poems Collins was strictly following one of the various fashions of the day.

The difference between the Classicism of Collins and Pope is that whereas Pope is a thoroughly classical writer in his style as well as spirit, Collins, on the other hand, is classical only in his style—the finished and graceful verse ; but in the spirit and sentiment of his poetry he is purely Romantic. He has the melancholy mood, love for humble and rustic aspects of nature, which are the characteristics of Romantic poetry. Moreover, even in his style, Collins follows the classical method, perfect finish and grace and the use of the heroic couplet only in the *Eclogues*, but in his odes he discards this and follows the vagaries of his own mind like a true Romantic. So whereas Pope was basically a classical poet, the champion of good sense, finished style and perfect form of the heroic couplet, Collins was a classical writer only because he could not escape the strong influence of his times, though his real sympathies and tendencies lay towards Romanticism. If he had been blessed with good health, he might have completely repudiated the classical methods and followed the bent of his own individual nature, which was markedly Romantic. In his later odes he did try to work in his own way, but on account of ill health and misfortunes he could produce only a very small quantity of work, and at the same time being unable to perfect even what little he could do, he had to, at times, succumb to the contemporary fashion. Collins, therefore, is a classical writer not by choice, but by chance, while Pope was a classical writer by choice, and he deliberately followed the classical models not merely in form and style but also in substance and thought of his poetry.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROMANTIC POETS

The Romantic period (1798-1824) is the most fruitful period in the history of English poetry. The revolt against the classical school, which had been started by writers like Chatterton, Collins, Gray, Burns, Cowper etc., reached its climax during this period, and some of the greatest and most popular English poets like Wordsworth Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats belong to this period. This period starts from 1798 with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the famous Preface which Wordsworth wrote as a manifesto of the new form of poetry which he and Coleridge introduced in opposition to the poetry of the Classical school. In the Preface to the First Edition he did not touch upon any other characteristic of Romantic poetry except the simplicity and naturalness of its diction. There he writes : "The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertaining how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adopted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." In the longer Preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, where Wordsworth explains his theories of poetic imagination, he again returns to the problem of the proper language of poetry : "The language, too, of these men (that is, those in humble and rustic life) has been adopted because from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple unelaborated expression."

Wordsworth chose the language of the common people as the vehicle of his poetry, because it is the most sincere expression of the deepest and rarest passions and feelings. This was the first point of attack on the artificial and formal style of classical school of poetry. The other point at which Wordsworth attacked the old school was its insistence on the town and the artificial way of life which prevailed there. He wanted the poet to breathe fresh air of the hills and beautiful natural scenes, and become interested in rural life and the simple folk living in the lap of nature. A longing to be

rid of the precision and order of everyday life drove him to the mountains, where, as he describes in his *Lines written above Tintern Abbey* :

> The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion ; the tall rock
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite.

By attacking the supremacy of the heroic couplet as the only form of writing poetry, and substituting it by simple and natural diction ; by diverting the attention of the poet from the artificial town life to the life in the woods, mountains, and villages inhabited by simple folk ; and by asserting the inevitable role of imagination and emo tions in poetry as against dry intellectualism which was the chief characteristic of the classical school, Wordsworth not only emancipated the poet from the tyranny of literary rules and conventions which circumscribed his freedom of expression, but he also opened up before him vast regions of experience which in the eighteenth century had been closed to him. His revolt against the classical school was in keeping with the political and social revolutions of the time as the French Revolution and the American War of Independence, which broke away with the tyranny of social and political domination, and which proclaimed the liberty of individual or nation to be the master of its own destiny. Just as liberty of the individual was the watchword of the French Revolution, liberty of a nation from foreign domination was the watchword of the Amercian War of Independence ; in the same manner liberty of the poet from the tyranny of literary rules and conventions was the watchword of the new literary movement which we call by the name of Romantic movement. It is also termed as the Romantic Revival; because all these characteristics—the liberty of the writer to choose the theme and form of his literary production, the importance given to imagination and human emotions, and a broad and catholic outlook on life in all its manifestations in towns, villages, mountains, rivers etc. belonged to the literature of the Elizabethan Age which can be called as the first Romantic age in English literature. But there was a difference between the Elizabethan Age and the Romantic Age, because in the latter the Romantic spirit was considered as discovery of something which once was, but had been lost. The poets of the Romantic period, therefore, always looked back to the Elizabethan masters—Shakespeare, Spenser and others—and got inspiration from them. They were under the haunt-

ing influence of feelings which had already been experienced, and a certain type of free moral life which had already been lived, and so they wanted to recapture the memory and rescue it from fading away completely.

Romantic poetry which was the antithesis of Classical poetry had many complexities. Unlike classical poets who agreed on the nature and form of poetry, and the role that the poet is called upon to play, the Romantic poets held different views on all these subjects. The artistic and philosophic principles of neo-classical poetry were completely summarised by Pope, and they could be applied to the whole of Augustan poetry. But it is difficult to find a common denominator which links such poets as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Shelley and Keats. The reason of this was that there was abundance and variety of genius. No age in English literature produced such great giants in the field of poety. Moreover, it was the age of revolutionary change, not only in view of the character and function of poetry, but in the whole conception of the nature of man and of the world in which he found himself. The evenness, equanimity and uniformity of the classical age was broken, and it was replaced by strong currents of change following in various directions. One poet reacted to a particular current more strongly or sympathetically than the other poet. Thus each poet of the Romantic period stands for himself, and has his own well-defined individuality. The only common characteristic that we find in them is their intense faith in imagination which could not be controlled by any rules and regulations.

In fact the most distinctive mark which distinguished the Romantic poets from the Classical poets was the emphasis which the former laid on imagination. In the eighteenth century imagination was not a cardinal point in poetical theory. For Pope, Johnson and Dryden the poet was more an interpreter than a creator, more concerned with showing the attractions of what we already know than with expeditions into the unfamiliar and the unseen. They were less interested in the mysteries of life than in its familiar appearances, and they thought that their task was to display this with as much charm and truth as they could command. But for the Romantics imagination was fundamental, because they thought that without that poetry was impossible. They were conscious of a wonderful capacity to create imaginary worlds, and they could not believe that this was idle or false. On the contrary, they thought that to curb it was to deny something vitally necessary to the whole being.

Whereas the Classical poets were more interested in the visible world, Romantic poets obeyed an inner call to explore more fully the world of the spirit. They endeavoured to explore the mysteries of life, and thus understand it better. It was this search for the unseen world that awoke the inspiration of the Romantics and made poets of them. They appealed not to the logical mind, but to the complete self, in the whole range of intellectual faculties, senses and emotions.

Though all the Romantic poets believed in an ulterior reality and based their poetry on it, they found it in different ways and made different uses of it. They varied in the degree of importance which they attached to the visible world and in their interpretation of it. Coleridge conceived of the world of facts as an "inanimate cold world" in which "objects, as objects, are essentially fixed and dead". It was the task of the poet to transform it by his power of imagination, to bring the dead world back to life. When we turn to *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christable* it becomes clear that Coleridge thought that the task of poetry is to convey the mystery of life by the power of imagination. He was fascinated by the notion of unearthly powers at work in the world, and it was this influence which he sought to catch. The imagination of the poet is his creative shaping spirit, and it resembles the creative power of God. Just as God creates this universe, the poet also creates a universe of his own by his imagination.

Wordsworth also thought with Coleridge that imagination is the most important gift that the poet can have. He agreed with Coleridge that this activity resembles that of God. But according to Wordsworth imagination is a comprehensive faculty comprising many faculties. So he explains that the imagination

> Is but another name for absolute power
> And clearest insight, amplitude of mind
> And Reason in her most exalted mood.

Wordsworth differs from Coleridge in his conception of the external world. For him the world is not dead but living and has its own soul. Man's task is to enter into communion with this soul. Nature was the source of his inspiration, and he could not deny to it an existence at least as powerful as man's. But since nature lifted him out of himself, he sought for a higher state in which the soul of nature and the soul of man could be united in a single harmony.

Shelley was no less attached to the imagination and gave it no less a place in his theory of poetry. He saw that the task of reason is simply

to analyse a given thing and to act as an instrument of the imagination, which uses its conclusions to create a synthetic and harmonious whole. He called poetry "the Expression of Imagination", because in it diverse things are brought together in harmony instead of being separated through analysis. Shelley tried to grasp the whole of things in its essential unity, to show what is real and what is merely phenomenal, and by doing this to display how the phenomenal depends on the real. For him the ultimate reality is the eternal mind, and this holds the universe together. In thought and feeling, in consciousness and spirit, Shelley found reality. He believed that the task of the imagination is to create shapes by which this reality can be revealed.

Keats had passionate love for the visible world and at times his approach was highly sensuous. But he had a conviction that the ultimate reality is to be found only in the imagination. What it meant to him can be seen from some lines in *Sleep and Poetry*, in which he asks why imagination has lost its power and scope :

> Is there so small a range
> In the present strength of manhood, that the high
> Imagination cannot freely fly
> As she was wont of old ? Prepare her steeds
> Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds
> Upon the clouds ? Has she not shown us all ?
> From the clear space of ether, to the small
> Breath of new buds unfolding ? From the meaning
> Of Jone's eyebrow, to the tender greening
> Of April meadows.

Through the imagination Keats sought an ultimate reality to which a door was opened by his appreciation of beauty through the senses. For him imagination is that absorbing and exalting faculty which opens the way to an unseen spiritual order.

Thus the great Romantic poets agreed that their task was to find through the imagination some transcendental order, some inner and ultimate reality which explains the outward appearance of things in the visible world and the effect which they produce in us. Each one gave his interpretation of the universe, the relation of God, the connection between the visible and the invisible, nature and man, as he saw it through the power of his imagination. Each set forth his own vision through the richness of his poetry, and gave it a concrete individual shape. They refused to accept the ideas of other men on trust or to sacrifice imagination to agreement. By means of their

creative art they tried to awaken the imagination of the reader to the reality that lies behind and in familiar things, to rouse him from the dead and dull routine of custom, and make him conscious of the unfathomable mysteries of life. They tried to show that mere reason is not sufficient to understand the fundamental problems of life; what is required is inspired intuition. Thus their view of life and poetry was much wider and deeper than that of their predecessors in the eighteenth century, because they appealed to the whole spiritual nature of man and not merely to his reason and common sense whose scope is limited.

The poets of the Romantic age can be classified into three groups : (*i*) The Lake School, consisting of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey ; (*ii*) The Scott group, including Campbell and Moore ; and (*iii*) the group comprising Byron, Shelley and Keats. The first two groups were distinctly earlier than the third, so we have two eight years flood periods of supreme by great poetry, namely 1789-1806 and 1816 1824, separated by a middle period when by comparison creative energy had ebbed.

(*a*) **The Lake Poets.** The Lake Poets formed a 'school' in the sense that they worked in close co-operation, and their lives were spent partly in the Lake district. Only Wordsworth was born there, but all the three lived there for a shorter or longer period. Linked together by friendship, they were still further united by the mutual ardour of their revolutionary ideas in youth, and by the common reaction which followed in their riper years. They held many of the poetic beliefs in common. Wordsworth and Coleridge lived together for a long time and produced the *Lyrical Ballads* by joint effort in 1798. They had original genius and what they achieved in the realm of poetry was supported by Southey who himself did not possess much creative imagination. The literary revolution which is associated with their names was accomplished in 1800, when in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge explained further their critical doctrines.

Describing the genesis (production) of the poems contained in the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge wrote later in his greatest critical work—*Biographia Literaria* (1817) :

"During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversation turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving

the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination. The thought suggested itself that series of poems may be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural ; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real...For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life ; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or notice them, when they present themselves. In this idea originated the plan of *Lyrical Ballads* in which it was agreed that my endeavour should be directed to persons and characters supernatural... Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to give charm of novelty to things of every day."

This was the framework of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Regarding the style, Wordsworth explained in the famous preface :

"The poems were published which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain how far, by fitting no material arrangement, a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a poet may rationally endeavour to impart...Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language."

Wordsworth thus registered a protest against the artificial 'poetic diction' of the classical school, which was separated from common speech. He declared emphatically : 'There is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and poetical composition." Thus it was in the spirit of a crusader that Wordsworth entered upon his poetic career. His aim was to lift poetry from its depraved state and restore to it its rightful position.

WORDSWORTH
(1770-1850)

William Wordsworth was the greatest poet of the Romantic period. The credit of originating the Romantic movement goes to him. He refused to abide by any poetic convention and rules, and forged his own way in the realm of poetry. He stood against many generations of great poets and critics like Dryden, Pope and

Johnson, and made way for a new type of poetry. He declared : "A poet is a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind." The truth of this statement struck down the ideal of literary conventions based on reason and rationality, which had been blindly worshipped for so long. By defining poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" he revolted against the dry intellectuality of his predecessors. By giving his ideas about the poetic language as simple and natural, he opposed the "gaudiness and inane phraseology" of the affected classical style.

Wordsworth wrote a large number and variety of lyrics, in which he can stir the deepest emotions by the simplest means. There we find the aptness of phrase and an absolute naturalness which make a poem once read as a familiar friend. Language can scarcely be at once more simple and more full of feeling than in the following stanza from one of the 'Lucy Poems' :

> Thus Nature spoke—The work was done,
> How soon my Lucy's race was run.
> She died, and left to me
> This heath, this calm, and quiet scene,
> The memory of what has been,
> And never more will be.

Besides lyrics Wordsworth wrote a number of sonnets of rare merit like *To Milton*, *Westminster Bridge*, *The World is too much with us*, in which there is a fine combination of the dignity of thought and language. In his odes, as *Ode to Duty* and *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, he gives expression to high ideals and philosophy of life. In the *Immortality Ode*, Wordsworth celebrates one of his most cherished beliefs that our earliest intuitions are the truest, and those are really happy who in their mature years keep themselves in touch with their childhood :—

> Hence, in a season of calm weather,
>   Though inland far we be,
> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
>   Which brought us hither
> Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the children sport upon the shore
> And hear the mighty waters rolling ever more.

But Wordsworth was not merely a lyrical poet; he justly claims to be the poet of Man, of Nature, and of Human Life.

Though in his youth he came under the influence of the ideals of the French Revolution, he was soon disillusioned on account of its excesses, and came to the conclusion that the emancipation of man cannot be effected by political upheavals, but by his living a simple, natural life. In the simple pieties of rustic life he began to find a surer foundation for faith in mankind than in the dazzling hopes aroused by the French Revolution. Moreover, he discovered that there is an innate harmony between Nature and Man. It is when man lives in the lap of nature that he lives the right type of life. She has an ennobling effect on him, and even the simplest things in nature can touch a responsive chord in man's heart :—

> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

According to Wordsworth, man is a part of nature. In his poem *Resolution and Independence* the old man and his surroundings make a single picture :

> Himself he propped, limbs, body, and pale face,
> Upon a long grey staff of shaven wood ;
> And, still as I drew near with gentle pace
> Upon the margin of that moorish flood,
> Motionless like a cloud the old man stood
> That hearth not the loud winds when they call ;
> And moveth all together, if it move at all.

Besides the harmony between Man and Nature, the harmony of Wordsworth's own spirit with the universe is the theme of his greatest Nature poems : *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey*, *Yew Trees* and *The Simplon Pass*.

Wordsworth is famous for his lyrics, sonnets, odes and short descriptive poems. His longer poems contain much that is prosy and uninteresting. The greater part of his work, including *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* was intended for a place in a single great poem, to be called *The Recluse*, which should treat of Nature, man and society. *The Prelude*, treating of the growth of a poet's mind was to introduce this work. *The Excursion* (1814) is the second book of *The Recluse*; and the third was never completed. In his later years, Wordsworth wrote much poetry which is dull and unimaginative. But there is not a single line in his poetry which has not got the dignity and high moral value which we associate with Wordsworth who, according to Tennyson, "uttered nothing base".

The new type of poetry of Wordsworth was severely criticised

by contemporary reviewers though they acknowledged its merit. Writing in The Edinburgh Review (1807) Jeffrey remarked: "The *Lyrical Ballads* were unquestionably popular, and we have no hesitation in saying, deservedly popular; for in spite of their occasional vulgarity, affectation, and silliness, they were undoubtedly characterised by a strong spirit of originality, of pathos, and natural feeling; and recommended to all good minds by the clear impression which they bore of the amiable disposition and virtuous principles of the author. By the help of these qualities, they were enabled, not only to recommend themselves to the indulgence of many judicious readers, but even to beget among a pretty numerous class of persons, a sort of admiration of the very defects by which they were attended. It was precisely because of this perverseness and bad taste of this new school combined with a great deal of genius and laudable feeling, that we are afraid of their spreading and gaining ground among us, and that we entered into the discussion with a degree of zeal and animosity which some might think unreasonable towards the authors, to whom so much merit had been conceded."

Coleridge, of course, was the greatest champion of Wordsworth. He observed, "Wordsworth is a poet, a most original poet. He no more resembles Milton than Milton resembles Shakespeare—no more resembles Shakespeare than Shakespeare resembles Milton. He is himself and I dare affirm, that he will hereafter be admitted as the first and greatest philosophical poet, the only man who has effected a complete and constant synthesis of thought and feeling and combined them with poetic forms, with the music of pleasurable passion, and with Imagination or the *modifying* power in the highest sense of the word, in which I have ventured to oppose it to Fancy, or the *aggregating* power—in a sense in which it is a dim analogue of creation—not all that we can *believe*, but all that we conceive of creation."

Hazlitt admiring the new poetry of Wordsworth, wrote in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825): "In describing human nature Mr. Wordsworth equally shuns the common vantage-grounds of popular story, of striking incident, of fatal catastrophe, as cheap and vulgar modes of producing an effect. He scans the human race as the naturalist measures the earth's zone, without attending to the picturesque points of view, the abrupt inequalities of surface. He contemplates the passions and habits of men, not in their extremes, but in their first elements; their follies and vices, not at their height, with

all their embossed evils upon their heads, but as lurking in embryo, the seeds of the disorder inwoven with our own constitution. He only sympathises with those simple forms of feeling which mingle at once with his own identity, or with the stream of general humanity. To him the great and the small are the same; the near and the remote; what appears, and what only is. The general and the permanent, like the Platonic ideas; are his only realities. All accidental varieties and individual contrasts are lost in an endless continuity of feeling, like drops of water in the ocean stream. An intense intellectual egotism swallows up everything. The power of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought. His imagination lends life and feeling only to the 'bare trees and mountain bare', peoples the viewless tracts of air, and converses with the silent clouds.

"Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is one of the innovations of the time. It partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age : the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his experiments. His Muse is a levelling one. It proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard. It is distinguished by a proud humility. It relies upon its own resources, and disdains external show and relief. It takes the commonest events and objects, as a test to prove that nature is always interesting from its inherent truth and beauty, without any of the ornaments of dress or pomp of circumstances to set it off. Hence the unaccountable mixture of seeming simplicity and real abstruseness in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Fools have laughed at, wise men scarcely understood them. He takes a subject or story merely as pegs or loops to hang thought and feeling on; the incidents are trifling, in proportion to his contempt for imposing appearances; the reflections are profound, according to the gravity and the aspiring pretensions of his mind.

"The daisy looks up to him with sparkling eye as an old acquaintance : the cuckoo haunts him with sounds of early youth not to be expressed : a linnet's nest startles him with boyish delight : an old withered thorn is weighed down with a heap of recollections : a grey cloak, seen on some solid moor, torn by the wind, or drenched in the air, afterwards becomes an object of imagination to him : even the lichens on the rock have a life and being in his thoughts. He has described all these objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new

view or aspect of nature. He is in this sense the most original poet now living, and the one whose writings could least be spared : for they have no substitute elsewhere. The vulgar do not read them, the learned, who see all things through books, do not understand them : but the author has created himself an interest in the heart of the retired and lonely student, of nature, which can never die."

John Stuart Mill, whose restless mind found tranquillity by reading the poems of Wordsworth, wrote in his *Autobiography*: "What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not merely outward beauty, but states of feeling and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure. which could be shared in by all human beings ; which had no connection with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social conditions of mankind. From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence. There have certainly been, even in our own age, greater poets than Wordsworth ; but poetry of deeper and loftier feeling could not have done for me at that time what he did. I needed to be made to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this not only without turning away from, but with a greatly increased interest in the common feelings and common destiny of human beings.........The result was that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never subject to it. I long continued to value Wordsworth less according to his intrinsic merit, than by the measure of what he had done for me. Compared with the greatest poets, he may be said to be the poet of unpoetical nature, possessed of quiet and contemplative tastes. But unpoetical natures are precisely those which require poetical cultivation. This poetic cultivation Wordsworth is much more fitted to give, than poets who are intrinsically far more poets than he."

During the Victorian period critics arrived at a more balanced assessment of Wordsworth's poetry. In his *Appreciations* (1874) Pater wrote :

"This sense of a life in natural objects, which in most poetry

is but a rhetorical artifice, is with Wordsworth the assertion of what for him is almost literal fact. To him every natural object seemed to possess more or less of a moral or spiritual life, to be capable of companionship with man, full of expression, of inexplicable affinities and delicacies of intercourse. An emanation, a particular spirit, belonged, not to the moving leaves or water only, but to the distant peak of the hills arising suddenly, by some change of perspective, above the nearer horizon, to the passing space of light across the plain......

"And it was through nature, thus ennobled by a semblance of passion and thought, that he approached the spectacle of human life. Human life, indeed, is for him, at first only an additional, accidental grace on the expressive landscape. When he thought of man, it was of man as in the presence and under the influence of these effective natural objects, and linked to them by many associations......

"And seeing man thus as a part of nature, elevated and solemnised in proportion as his daily life and occupation brought him into companionship with permanent natural objects, his very religion forming new links for him with the narrow limits of the valley, the low vaults of the church, the rough stones of his home, made intense for him now with profound sentiment, Wordsworth was able to appreciate passion in the lowly. He chooses to depict people from humble life, because, being nearer to nature than others, they are on the whole more impassioned, certainly more direct in their expression of passion than other men ; it is for this direct expression of passion that he values their humble words. In much that he did in exaltation of rural life, he was pleading indirectly for that sincerity, that perfect fidelity to one's inward presentations, to the precise features of the picture within, without which any profound poetry is impossible. It was not for their tameness, but for this passionate sincerity, that he chose incidents and situations from common life, 'related in a selection of language really used by men'.

"And so he has much for those who value highly the concentrated presentment of passion, who appraise men and women by their susceptibility to it, and art and poetry as they afford the spectacle of it. Breaking from time to time into the pensive spectacle of their daily toil, their occupations near to nature, come those great elementary feelings, lifting and solemnising their language and giving it a natural music. The great distinguishing passion came to

Michael by the sheepfold, to Ruth by the wayside, adding these humble children of the furrow to the true aristocracy of passionate souls with a penetrative pathos, which puts him in the same rank with the masters of the sentiment of pity in literature, he collects all the traces of vivid excitement which were to be found in that pastoral world. A sort of biblical depth and solemnity hangs over this strange, new, passionate, pastoral world, of which he first raised the image, and the reflection of which some of our best modern fiction has caught from him......

"That the end of life is not action but contemplation—*being* as distinct from *doing*—a certain disposition of the mind : is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality. In poetry, in art, if you enter into their true spirit at all, you touch this principle, in a measure : these, by their virtual sterility, are a type of beholding for the mere joy of beholding. To treat life in the spirit of art, is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified : to encourage such treatment, the true moral significance of art and poetry, Wordsworth, and other poets, who have been like him in ancient or more recent times, are the masters, the experts, in the art of impassioned contemplation. Their work is not to teach lessons, or enforce rules, or even to stimulate us to noble ends ; but to withdraw the thoughts for a little while from the mere machinery of life to fix them, with appropriate emotion, on the spectales of those great facts in man's existence which no machinery affects, 'on the great universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of their occupations, and the entire world of nature',—on 'the operations of the elements and the appearance of the visible universe, on storm and sunshine, on the revolutions of the reasons, on cold and heat, on the loss of friends and kindred, on injuries and resentments, on gratitude and hope, on fear and sorrow.'

"To witness this spectacle with appropriate emotions, is the aim of all culture ; and of these emotions poetry like Wordsworth's is a great nourisher and stimulant...

"Such is the figure of the more powerful and original poet, hidden away, in part under those weaker elements in Wordsworth's poetry, which for some minds determine their entire character ; a poet somewhat bolder and more passionate than might at first be supposed, but not too bold for true poetical taste : an impassioned writer, you might sometimes fancy, yet thinking the chief aim, in life and art alike, to be a certain deep emotion ; seeking most often the

great elementary passions in lowly places ; having at least this condition of all impassioned work, that he aims always at an absolute sincerity of feeling and diction, so that he is the true forerunner of the deepest and most passionate poetry of our own day, yet going back also, with something of a protest against the conventional fervour of much of the poetry popular in his own time, to those older English poets, whose unconscious likeness often comes out in him."

Referring to Wordsworth's moral philosophy, which is the solid basis of his poetry, Leslie Stephen wrote in 1789 :

"Wordsworth can pierce furthest behind the veil; and embody most efficiently the thoughts and emotions which come to us in our most solemn and reflective moods. Other poetry becomes trifling when we are making our inevitable passage through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Wordsworth's alone retains its power. We love him the more as we grow older and become more deeply impressed with the sadness and seriousness of life ; we are apt to grow weary of his rivals when we have finally quitted the regions of youthful enchantment. And I take the reason to be that he is not merely a melodious writer, or a powerful utterer of deep emotion, but a true philosopher. His poetry wears well because it has solid substance. He is a prophet and a moralist, as well as a mere singer. His ethical system, in particular, is as distinctive and capable of systematic exposition as that of Butler.

"We may now see what ethical theory underlies Wordsworth's teaching of the transformation of instinct into reason : We must start from the postulate that there is in fact a Divine order in the universe ; and that conformity to this order produces beauty as embodied in the external world, and is the condition of virtue as regulating our character. It is by obedience to the 'stern law-giver', Duty, that flowers gain their fragrance, and that 'the most ancient heavens' preserve their freshness and strength. But this postulate does not seek for justification in abstract metaphysical reasoning. The 'Intimations of Immortality' are precisely intimations, not intellectual intuitions. They are vague and emotional, not distinct and logical. They are a feeling of harmony, not a perception of innate ideas. And on the other hand, our instincts are not a mere chaotic mass of passions, to be gratified without considering their place and function in a certain definite scheme. They have been implanted in the Divine hand, and the harmony which we feel correspond to a real order.

"It only remains to be added once more that Wordsworth's

poetry derives its power from the same source as his philosophy. It speaks to our strongest feelings because his speculations rest upon our deepest thoughts. His singular capacity for investing all objects with a glow derived from early associations ; his keen sympathy with natural and simple emotions; his sense of sanctifying influences which can be extracted from sorrow, are of equal value to his power over our intellect and our imagination. His psychology, stated systematically, is rational ; and, when expressed passionately, turns into poetry. To be sensitive to the most important phenomena is the first step equally towards a poetical or a scientific exposition. To see these truly is a condition of making the poetry harmonious and the philosophy logical. And it is often difficult to say which power is most remarkable in Wordsworth.

Matthew Arnold, who considered that the superiority of Wordsworth over other poets arises from his powerful use, in his best pieces, of ideas 'on man, on nature, and on human life,' observed in his *Essay on Wordsworth* (1879) :—

"Voltaire, with his signal acuteness, most truly remarked that 'no nation has treated in poetry moral ideas with more energy and *depth* than the English nation'. And he adds : 'There, it seems to me, is the great merit of the English poets'. Voltaire does not mean, by 'treating in poetry moral ideas', the composing moral and didactic poems :—that brings us but a very little way in poetry. He means just the same thing as was meant when I spoke 'of the noble and profound application of ideas to life', and he means the application of these ideas under the conditions fixed for us by the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth. If it is said that to call these ideas *moral* ideas is to introduce a strong and injurious limitation, I answer that it is to do nothing of the kind, because moral ideas are really so main a part of human life. The question, *how to live*, is itself a moral idea ; and it is the question which most interests every man, and with which, in some way or other, he is perpetually occupied. ·

"And when we come across a poet like Wordsworth, who sings

> Of truth, of grandeur, beauty, love and hope,
> And melancholy fear subdued by faith,
> Of blessed consolations in distress,
> Of moral strength and intellectual power,
> Of joy in widest commanlty spread.

then we have a poet intent on 'the best and master thing', and he

prosecutes his journey home. We say, for brevity' sake, that he deals with *life*, because he deals with that in which life really consists. This is what Voltaire means to praise in the English poets,—this dealing with what is really life. But always it is the mark of the greatest poets that they deal with it......

"Wordsworth deals with it, and his greatness lies in his dealing with it so powerfully. He is to be placed above poets like Voltaire, Dryden, Pope, Lessing, Schiller, because these famous personages, with a thousand gifts, and merits, never, or scarcely ever, attain the distinctive accent and utterance of the high and genuine poets at all. Burns, Keats, not to speak of others in our list, have this accent ; who can doubt it ? And they have treasures of humour, felicity, passion, for which in Wordsworth we shall look in vain. Where, then, is Wordsworth's superiority ? It is here ; he deals with more of *life* than they do ; he deals with *life*, as a whole, more powerfully".

Describing the effect of *Lyrical Ballads* on himself, Mark Rutherford wrote in his *Autobiography* (1881) "*Lyrical Ballads* conveyed to me no new doctrine, and yet the change it wrought in me could only be compared with that which is said to have been wrought on Paul himself by the Divine apparition. Looking over the *Lyrical Ballads* again, as I have looked over it a dozen times since then, I can hardly see what it was which stirred me so powerfully, nor do I believe that it communicated much to me which could be put into words. But it excited a movement and a growth which went on till, by degrees, all the systems which enveloped me like a body gradually decayed from me and fell away into nothing. Of more importance, too, than the decay of systems was the birth of a habit of inner reference and a dislike to occupy myself with anything which did not in some way or other touch the soul, or was not the illustration or embodiment of some spiritual law. There is, of course, a definite explanation to be given of one effect produced by the *Lyrical Ballads*. God is nowhere formally deposed, and Wordsworth would have been the last man to say that he had lost his faith in the God of his fathers. But his real God is not the God of the Church, but the God of the hills, the abstraction Nature, and to this my reverence was transferred. Instead of an object of worship which was altogether artificial, remote, never coming into genuine contact with me, I had now one which I thought to be real, one in which literally I could live and move and have my being, an actual fact present before my eyes. God was brought down from that heaven of the books, and dwelt on the downs in the far away distances, and in every cloud-shadow

which wandered across the valley. Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every religious reformer has done—he re-created my Supreme Divinity ; substituting a new and living spirit for the old deity, once alive, but gradually hardened into an ideal."

Giving an appreciation of Wordsworth's poetry, Swinburne wrote in his essay *Wordsworth and Byron* (1884) : 'Wordsworth's healing power', his gift of direct or indirect refreshment, the comfort and support of his perfect and pure sincerity in all his dealings with nature, can best be felt, can only perhaps be felt in full, when we consent to forget and succeed in forgetting his excursion or excursions into the preacher's province, a territory dense and dubious with dia-dactic quags and theorophic briars. In his own far loftier land of natural contemplation, when least meditative with any prefixed purpose, he could do such work and give such gifts as no other poet has given or has done. In such a poem, for example, as *Resolution and Independence*, there is a breadth of prouder music, a ring of keener sound, than we expect in elegy ; it has more in its highest notes of quality proper to lyric style—when the lyrist is likewise a thinker ; to the lyric style of Sophocles or Pindar. And only in such works as the highest and rarest even of theirs may anyone think to find the like of such a verse as this :

The sleepless soul that perished in its pride

I will back that against any of Arnold's three representative quotations from Homer, from Dante, and from Shakespeare. It is like nothing from any other hand ; the unspeakable greatness of its quality is Wordsworth's alone ; and I doubt if it would be really as rash as it might seem to maintain that there is not and never will be a greater verse in all the world of song".

Now let us examine the important characteristics of Wordsworth as a poet.

1. **Wordsworth as the Poet of Nature.** Wordsworth's chief originality as a poet is to be sought in his poetry of Nature. From his early boyhood to his old age, Nature was the chief source of his inspiration. Almost all the poems that he wrote were saturated with his love for, and an abiding faith in, Nature. De Quincey was right when he said, "Wordsworth has his passion for the Nature fixed in his blood ; it was a necessity of his being, like that of a mulberry leaf to a silk-worm, and through his commerce with Nature did he live and breathe. Hence it was from the truth of his love that his knowledge grew."

The education of Wordsworth's feelings, passions and receptive powers was mainly the work of Nature. Both in *The Prelude* and in the *Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey* he has carefully distinguished the several stages of his education by Nature, and the several phases of his love for her. During the first of these stages, in his boyhood, Nature was

> But secondary to my own pursuits
> And animal activities and all
> Their trivial pleasures.

Gradually these pleasures and activities lost their charm for Wordsworth, yet his love of Nature, for her own sake, gained in depth and intensity :—

> The props of my affections were removed,
> And yet the building stood, as if sustained
> By its own spirit ? All that I beheld
> Was dear, and hence to finer influxes
> The mind lay open to a more exact
> And close communion.

This second stage of his love for Nature baffled his own powers of description :—

> I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion ; the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite ; a feeling and a love
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, or any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.

This stage lasted until Wordsworth was twenty-two, when it was driven out by the fever of political thought and passion engendered by the French Revolution. When the crisis was over, this love of Nature returned to him, but it no longer held sway over his senses. It was subdued to a dominant scheme of thought, and was combined with the love of man, and with a deep sense of the pathos of things.

Wordsworth's delight in nature is shown in his loving and minute descriptions of natural objects. His descriptions never stray far from the object before him, and sometimes are the work of the most delicate observation. The poem on *Green Linnet* was praised by Coleridge for its accurate loveliness:

Amid yon lift of hazel trees,
That twinkle to the gusty breeze
Behold him perched in ecstasies
Yet seeming still to hover ;
There ! where the flutter of his wings
Upon his back and body flings
Shadow and sunny glimmerings,
That cover him all over.

But it is not the minute, precise and loving observations of the aspects of Nature that give Wordsworth his pre-eminence as the poet of Nature. Certainly he was one of the most truthful describers when his task was to describe, but in the accuracy and subtlety of outward detail, he has been equalled and even surpassed by poets like Crabbe and Tennyson. Wordsworth's undisputed sovereignty lies in his extraordinary faculty of giving utterance to some of the most elementary, and at the same time, obscure, sensations of man confronted by natural phenomena. His greatest triumph is poetic psychology. Though he raises the philosophical and moral structure on the data furnished by his sansaions, the considers these sensations, in themselves, beautiful and new, though they have been as old as mankind and he was the first to give a poetical expression to them.

One of the most striking instances of this is the poem, *There was a Boy*. The "gentle shock of mild surprise" felt by the lad who did not get the answer of owls to his own hootings, the sudden revelation to him of the beautiful landscape, his thrill of delight at seeing "the uncertain heaven received into the bosom of the steady lake"—all these emotions brought about by the enjoyment of common sensations had never been described by any poet before. They are subtle but at the same time universal emotions, and they have been described so aptly and beautifully that we cannot expect any other poet to hit on words more appropriate and more harmoniously combined for explaining the mostery of the soul. This is the essential feature of Wordsworth's poetry, When Coleridge read this poem he said that if he had met with these lines in a desert of Africa, he would have at once cried Wordsworth.

The same characteristic is found in *Nutting* where the poet tells of "the intruding sky" that filled the boyish nut-gatherer with remorse when he had torn the branches from a virgin bower. We also see it in the *Skating Scene*, where the poet describes the illusion of the senses experienced by the skater who had just stopped short after gliding at full speed. The surrounding hills appear strange to him, and they

still seem to wheel by "as if the earth had rolled with visible motion her diurnal round."

Hazlitt has remarked that one gets the impression that Wordsworth's poetry "was written in a mountainous scenery, from its bareness, simplicity, its loftiness and its depth." But the scenery among which he spent his days had penetrated into Wordsworth's mind and soul so deeply that he catches and expresses the characters of Nature not by description, but by incorporation, that is, the image of the outward world, instead of being directly presented, is reflected in the feelings and shines through the most indifferent words. There are a number of noble passages in Wordsworth's poetry describing the mountainous scenery so dear to him, especially in *The Excursion*, but we must turn to a poem like *Michael*, if we want to see the secret process of assimilation at work. It is here that we find a perfect harmony of scenery, character and style. In the passages where the poet gives us the speech of old Michael, or a glimpse of his stern mind, there is not a word of description, and yet the "pastoral mountains" are constantly conjured up with their raw atmosphere. We feel that every word that the shepherd utters has emanated from the mountains which had been his constant companions.

Wordsworth is at his best as a poet of Nature, when instead of asserting himself by arguments as in *The Prelude* or *Tintern Abbey* he freely allows his creed of the refining agency of the senses to pass into a sort of waking dream, and works by a method of intuitions. The best example of this method is the fourth of *The Lucy poems—Three years she grew in sun and shower*, where he tells us how Nature "an overseeing power to kindle and restrain" takes charge of his beloved since her tenderest years in order to make her "Lady of her own", imparting to her "the silence and the calm of mute insensate things", either bidding the storm "mould the maiden's form by silent sympathy," or causing "beauty born of murmuring sound to pass into her face."

2. **Wordsworth's Attitude to Nature and Man.** Like Milton, Wordsworth had a definite aim of writing poetry, which he kept in view all his life. He was not more than fourteen when he first became aware "of the infinite variety of natural appearances, which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them; and I made a resolution to supply, in some degree, the deficiency". Other poets had lain in the lap of

Nature now and then, but Wordsworth would espouse her. He did achieve this aim, and he wrote at length the story of his courtship and nuptials in his greatest autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, as well as in many other poems. He portrays her sometimes as a severe governess who teaches the young discipline and self-restraint. At other times he looks upon her as a young maiden, incarnate in the joyful figure of a highland girl, or a Lucy who is lovingly moulded by the dancing rivulets, and "floating clouds". Sometimes Nature is grave, sad and inarticulate like some Ruth or Margaret, or Leech-gatherer who is a part and parcel of the landscape. And Wordsworth is most himself when he finds himself alone with Nature, realises her as a living spirit, and is afterwards moved to find words for the divine experience.

The Prelude and the accompanying poems reveal to us the fact that there was traceable an order and development in Wordsworth's attitude to nature. To begin with, there was a long, unreflective childish phase, which began early. In *The Prelude*, he says, that when but ten years old,

> even then,
> I held unconscious intercourse with beauty,
> Old as creation, drinking in a pure
> Organic pleasure, from silver wreaths
> Of curbing mist.

He was full of blind joys and fears as well as vague and indefinite feelings which were so overpowering that he could not get rid of them even if he liked. Wordsworth has set forth in the *Immortality Ode* that dream-like vividness and splendour which invest objects of sight in childhood, and dizzy feeling of their unreality. He remembers not what he felt, but how felt, and traces all the vital and delicate stages of his development as a lover of Nature.

At sixteen he came out of the passive stage and became conscious of his love for Nature. He realised that she was rather part of him, than he of her, and that there was no difference between his own consciousness and the intuition of Nature. In the next stage of his development, Wordsworth became interested in his fellow-men, and discovered a new "human-heartedness" in his love of Nature. He found Man occupying the central place in the scheme of Nature, formed and ennobled by his contact with her. But after this stage, he found himself not merely alone with the universe, but alone in it. This is the impression which we get from the loftiest passages in *The Prelude*. The same feeling is expressed in *Tintern Abbey* :

> These beauteous forms,
> Through a long absence, have not been to me
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye ;
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and, 'mid the din
> Of towns and cities I have owed to them,
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart ;
> And passing even into my pure mind,
> With tranquil restoration.

This was the stage of Pantheism. Wordsworth realised in Nature the universal mind, a plastic, multifarious and generative spirit, a divine principle. But now a new region was in sight, and though so far the poet, up to his twentieth year had met with no misadventure, his path did not remain smooth for long. The new experience which greatly affected Wordsworth was the French Revolution. In the summer of 1792, in the first flush of his enthusiasm for the Revolution, the earth seemed "an inheritance new-fallen" to Man, a kingdom soon to be ruled in justice and perfect harmony by the common people. But the later events of the Revolution dealt blow after blow at his hopes, until at the end of 1794 he was in a condition of almost complete despair and bewilderment. Gone for ever were his original hopes for mankind, and his personal hopes of ever achieving anything worthwhile had also broken down. He had stepped over from Nature's kingdom to Man's, from the private happy world of the adolescent to the noisy arena of politics and war, and in this unfamiliar territory he had made mistakes. Nature had taught him to see Man as "a creature great and good." But he had painfully discovered a root of evil in himself, and the Revolution had taught him that in Mankind there was "reservoir of guilt filled up from age to age."

In his despondency at the ill consequences of the French Revolution, Wordsworth turned away from the works of man to seek and find comfort in the works of Nature. At first it was his sister, Dorothy, who was the main source in his restoration, and then Coleridge joined him. He admitted that it was Dorothy and Coleridge, and lastly Nature's Self by (their) human love assisted which

> Revived the feelings of my earlier life
> Gave me that knowledge and strength full of peace,
> Enlarged, and never more to be disturbed.

Nature led him back, with more composed and sure feelings to consider Man once more—not man of the politicians, and the moralists, but the

individual man, and "the man whom we behold with our own eyes." The men who pass their lives under a weight of labour and hardship, battling for a bare subsistence, would be able, he thought, to tell him more than all the theorists and economists. So he says :

From mouths of men, obscure and lowly, truths
Replete with honour, sounds in unison
With loftiest promises of good and fair.

Thus he came to a sense of another world, a world governed by fixed laws, like the world of external Nature; in man's essential character he found spiritual dignity, as in Nature he had found grace and power. The two thenceforward were one for him; the beatings of the heart of man were felt to obey that same law that holds the stars in their intercourse.

It was among the beggars, shepherds, vagrants, pensioners, who were now his chosen subjects, that he found those qualities which gave Rome her empire in the ancient world, and which, in the medieval world, drew whole peoples on pilgrimage. *In Resolution and Independence*, Wordsworth has described his interview with the old Leech-gatherer, whom he met in 1880, when he himself was in very difficult circumstances. He shifts the scene in order to show the old man at his work, and to set him among elemental powers akin to his majestic and indomitable spirit. He appears to him as the minister of consolation :

Beside a pool bare to the eye of Heaven,
I saw a man before me unawares :
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

He tells the poet that he earns his livelihood by roaming the moors and gathering leeches from the pond. Though they are more scarce than before, the old man says :

Yet still I persevere and find them where I may.

In the face of his indomitable spirit and cheerful indifference, the poet feels ashamed of his own weakness, and lack of courage.

In the seventh book of *Excursion*, Wordsworth describes the simple and cheerful peasant by similes drawn from Nature :

Grey locks profoundly round his temple hung
In clustering curls, like ivy, which the bite
Of winter cannot thin, the fresh air lodged
Within his cheek, as light within a cloud.

And in the sixth book, when Ellen's child died, the poet describes her miserable condition as :

> The green stalk of Ellen's life was snapped,
> And the flower dropped, as every eye could see,
> It hung its head in mortal languishment.

Man being the child of Nature, all the qualities and appearances of Nature find their counterpart in him. In fact, this imaginative fusion of Nature and Man was so complete with Wordsworth that he found a close affinity between the laws of Nature and the highest moral laws. He does not exhibit the moral nature of man in direct conflict with the hard laws of the material universe. In fact it is the hardness of these laws which tests the highest resources of Man and gives him his most significant opportunities. This idea is beautifully expressed in the *Ode to Duty*, where Wordsworth tells us that humanity can find consolation only by obeying the eternal laws of Nature.

3. **Wordsworth's Theory and Practice of Poetic Diction.** Wordsworth's famous declaration of principles concerning the nature of poetic diction are found in the prefaces to the *Lyrical Ballads*. In his preface to the first edition in 1798, Wordsworth simply mentioned : "The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purpose of poetic pleasure". It was in the long preface of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* that he put the issue on broader grounds, and explained his own view of poetic diction : "Humble and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently, may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated...."

Along with this comprehensive statement regarding the nature of poetic diction, Wordsworth also pointed out that some of the most interesting parts of his poems were written strictly in the language of prose, and even went further in making a wilder generalisation: "It may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." He also qualified his first raw statement that "the real language of men" was the right material. It was to be purified from provincial-

ism, and from all "rational causes of disgust and dislike"; it was to be "selected"; it was to be "the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation."

Whereas in the matter of poetic diction, Wordsworth breaks with the orthodox convention of his day and returns to the natural diction of normal men, in the matter of metre he appeals to tradition. The concurring testimony of the ages, he says, has established the laws of metre, and all reasonable people submit to them and acknowledge them. The state of excitement, which yields the right words and the right dictions of poetry, is altogether too much of a good thing if allowed a free run in the matter of rhythm :—

"There is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. The co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed when in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an inter-mixture of ordinary feelings and of feelings not strictly and necessarily connected with passion."

It other words, the poet by the aid of metre, exercises upon the passion of real life the same refining and "selecting" power as he exercises upon language of real life. It is not that he first uses real language, mechanically selected and refined, and that he then tampers this and passions which it embodies, by the unreality of metre. It is in fact by an imaginative process that he simultaneously and naturally attains both these objects—"selected" real language and the metrical forms which help to transmute passions. The conjunct effect of these simultaneous operating imaginative process is to "throw" not only over "the whole composition", but over the spirit of the reader, that half-sense of "unsubstantial existence" in which in truth poetry has its life.

It is clear that for Wordsworth's purposes and in relation to his chosen subjects, the diction that he used was the best diction, indeed in many cases, the only diction possible. As far as possible, he sticks to his theory in the writing of his poems, but there is no doubt that he does not always succeed in his mission. While passion holds him, and while he is moved or exalted, his language keeps its naked intensity. But when his own feeling flags and there is ground to be covered, he becomes mechanical and artificial. The plain words of common life no longer satisfy him, for the glow has gone out of them. In such prosy passages, though

simple, he is often feeble and talkative. On the other hand, when the lack of vitality consciously oppresses him, he endeavours to make it good by forced decoration and fancy. There his poetic diction becomes false and as vapid as any invented by the rhymesters of the eighteenth century. Instances of such flat passages are found especially in the later poetry of Wordsworth when the didactic element had become too predominant and his poetic powers were waning.

4. **Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry.** Wordsworth propounded his Theory of Poetry in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads.* There he touched the actual psychology of poetic inspiration. He begins by saying that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", but he goes on to say, "Though this be true, poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, has also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thought, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings." In Wordsworth's view, sensibility was not sufficient to ensure good poetry; it must be directed by a calm mind.

Wordsworth then elaborates this general statement by defining more closely the actual process of poetical inspiration. He says, "Poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity", and then tracing the course of poetry from this moment of origin, he explains: "The emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood uccessful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to it is carried on." The process, therefore, has four stages: recollection, contemplation, recurdescence, and composition.

Wordsworth further observes that in the process of composition the mind is upon the whole in a state of enjoyment, and will reflect this state in the accents of its utterance. For "poetry is the image of man and nature...It is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgement the more sincere because it is more formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in a spirit of love; further, it is a homage paid to the nature and masked dignity of man, to the grand, elementary principles of pleasure, by which he knows and feels, and lives and moves. We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure. When-

ever we sympathise with pain it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combination with pleasure."

It was Wordsworth's belief, almost a discovery, that memory, if it be habitually consulted, will not only supply a poet with his most valuable materials, but will also do for him the best part of his work. He indulged his memory with long periods of reverie, set it to travel to and fro among the past experiences of his life, and loved solitude and indolence chiefly because during the lulls of social intercourse and intellectual labour lost impressions were recaptured. He loved to sit in the "long barren silence", contemplating the submerged feelings and images in the mind, taking hold of them when they rose to the surface. His own function, as it seemed to him, was simply that of a still and patient chronicler.

Wordsworth had acquired an art of remaining perfectly motionless until the wild and timid creatures of his mind came about him. A large part of his poetry is taken up with these resuscitated feelings and their subject is "emotion recollected in tranquillity", though it is not always a tranquil emotion. The tense is often in the past, as in the poems on Lucy, in *The Daffodils*, in *The Solitary Reaper* and in much of the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, and in many of the sonnets with the exception of *Westminster Bridge* which owes its force to immediate emotion. Usually the edge is taken off the feeling, which is shown to us in the magic glass of the past. In *The Prelude*, the tone is retrospective in accordance with the nature of the subject, as also in *The Excursion* where most of the personages have only the past to talk of.

The two main points of Wordsworth's Theory of poetry—"all good poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", and "poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" find their best illustration in *The Daffodils*, where the poet says :—

> The waves beside them danced, but they
> Outdid the sparkling waves in glee;
> A poet could not but be gay
> In such a jocund company;
> I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
> What wealth the show to me had brought;
> For oft, when on my couch I lie
> In vacant or in pensive mood,
> They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude,
> And then my heart with pleasure fills
> And dances with the daffodils.

COLERIDGE

(1772—1834)

The genius of **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** was complementary to that of Wordsworth. While Wordsworth dealt with naturalism which was an important aspect of the Romantic Movement, Coleridge made the supernatural his special field, which was an equally important aspect. In his youth Coleridge came under the spell of the French Revolution and the high hopes which it held out for the suppressed section of mankind. He gave poetic expression to his political aspirations in *Religions Musings*, *Destiny of Nations* and *Ode on the Departing Year* (1796). But like Wordsworth he also began to think differently after the excesses of the Revolution. This change of thought is shown in his beautiful poem *France : an Ode* (1798) which he himself called his 'reincantation'. After that he, like Wordsworth, began to support the conservative cause.

Coleridge was a man of gigantic genius, but his lack of will-power and his addiction to opium prevented him from accomplishing much in the realm of poetry. Whatever he has written, though of high quality, is fragmentary. It was, however, in the fields of theology, philosophy and literary criticism that he exercised a tremendous and lasting influence. His two best-known poems are *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* which represent the high watermark of supernaturalism, as some of the best poems of Wordsworth represent the triumph of naturalism in English poetry. In these two poems Coleridge saved supernaturalism from the coarse sensationalism then in vogue by linking it with psychological truth. He had absorbed the spells of medievalism within himself and in these poems they appeared rarely distilled and inextricably blended with the poet's exquisite perception of the mysteries that surround the commonplace things of everyday life.

In *The Ancient Mariner*, which is a poetic masterpiece, Coleridge introduces the reader to a supernatural realm, with a phantom ship, a crew of dead men, the overwhelming curse of the alabatross, the polar spirit, the magic breeze, and a number of other supernatural things and happenings, but he manages to create a sense of absolute reality concerning these manifest absurdities. With that supreme art, which ever seems artless, Coleridge gives us glimpses from time to time of the wedding feast to which the mariner has been invited. The whole poem is wrought with the colour and glamour of the Middle Ages, and yet Coleridge makes no slavish attempt to reproduce the

past in a mechanical manner. The whole poem is the baseless fabric of a vision; a fine product of the ethereal and subtle fancy of a great poet. But in spite of its wildness, its medieval superstitions and irresponsible happenings, *The Ancient Mariner* is made actual and vital to our imaginations by its faithful pictures of Nature, its psychological insight and simple humanity. In it the poet deals in a superb manner with the primal emotions of love, hate, pain, remorse and hope. "He prayeth best who loveth best" is not an artificial ending of the poem in the form of a popular saying, but it is a fine summing up in a few lines of the spirit which underlies the entire poem. Its simple ballad form, its exquisite imagery, the sweet harmony of its verse, and the aptness of its phraseology, all woven together in an artistic whole, make this poem the most representative of the romantic school of poetry.

Christabel, which is a fragment, seems to have been planned as a story of a pure young girl who fell under the spell of a sorcer in the shape of the woman Geraldine. Though it has strange melody and many passages of exquisite poetry, and in sheer artistic power it is scarcely inferior to *The Ancient Mariner*, it has supernatural terrors of the popular hysterical novels. The whole poem is suffused in medieval atmosphere and everything is vague and indefinite. Like *The Ancient Mariner* it is written in a homely and simple diction and in a style which is simple and effortless.

Kubla Khan is another fragment in which the poet has painted a gorgeous Oriental dream picture. The whole poem came to Coleridge in a dream one morning when he had fallen asleep, and upon awakening he began to write hastily, but he was interrupted after fifty-four lines were written, and it was never finished.

Though Coleridge wrote a number of other poems—*Love*, *The Dark Ladie*, *Youth and Age*, *Dejection: an Ode*, which have grace, tenderness and touches of personal emotion, and a number of poems full of very minute descriptions of natural scenes, yet his strength lay in his marvellous dream faculty, and his reputation as a poet rests on *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* where he touches the highest marks of romantic poetry.

Unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge has not been a controversial figure in English poetry, and there has not been much change in the opinions of the critics about his poetry. So instead of giving critical judgments as in the case of other poets, we here examine briefly the important characteristics of Coleridge as a poet.

1. **Coleridge as the Poet of the Supernatural.** Coleridge is mainly the poet of the supernatural. In the *Biographia Literaria*, he has explained his own contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads*, which he wrote along with Wordsworth : "The thought suggested itself that a series of poems might be composed of two thoughts. In the one the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural ; and the interest aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real...For the second class the subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life ; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves. In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*, in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes the poetic faith."

Thus Coleridge himself undertook those poems in which there was a predominance of the supernatural element rather than the natural. The supernatural appealed to him with special power and was responsible for his finest work. Coleridge's supreme contribution to poetry was the three poems—*The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan*. These three poems are concerned with the supernatural. Though *Kubla Khan* is less directly concerned than *Christabel* or *The Ancient Mari ner*, yet the supernatural has found its way in its wild magnificence, whether in the "woman wailing for her demon lover" and the "ancestral voices prophesying war" or in the magical music at the close of the poem. In *Christabel* the whole scheme is based on the supernatural. In Geraldine we see an embodiment of evil powers from another world, which try to ruin the happiness of Christabel. Both *Kubla Khan* and *Chistabel* are fragments, and we can only imagine what they might have been. On the other hand, *The Ancient Mariner* is complete. It deals with the supernatural on a large scale and in it Coleridge completed his design, and showed what his powers could be.

In *The Ancient Mariner* Coleridge has treated the supernatural in such a manner that it becomes convincing and at the same time, in a sense, a criticism of life. In it he has presented a series of incredible events through a method of narration which creates an air of credu-

lity. In the first place he chose his subject well. The weird adventures of his Mariner take place on a boundless sea where anything can happen. There are spirits of another world, who are transformed by Coleridge into powers which watch over the good and evil actions of men, and award them appropriate reward and punishments. Coleridge does not merely confine himself to an outworn dread of spectres and phantoms, but he treats a wide range of human emotions connected with guilt and remorse, suffering and relief, hate and forgiveness, grief and joy. Moreover, though what he imagines is indeed supernatural, yet he sees it with so sharp a vision that it lives vividly before our eyes.

The great triumph of Coleridge in *The Ancient Mariner* lies in his relating the supernatural to familiar experiences, which his readers know and understand, and which touch their hearts and imagination, and he did this by exploiting some of the characteristics of dream. The images of dreams are so penetrated with emotional significance that they make a single and absorbing impression. Coleridge was much attracted by their strange powers. In *Christabel* he speaks of

> Such perplexity of mind
> As dreams too lively leave behind.

The Ancient Mariner, no doubt, bears the mark of such liveliness. On the surface it shows many qualities of a dream. For example, it moves in abrupt stages each of which has its own single dominating character. Moreover, its emotional impacts change rapidly but always come with an unusual force as if the poet were haunted and obsessed by them. When it is all over, it clings to the memory, and the effect is, as in a dream, more powerful and more effective than most effects when we are awake.

Now no one expects the events of dream to have the kind of connection which we find in waking life, but Coleridge manages to give his poem its own coherence, and rules and logic. Though the things move indeed in a mysterious way, yet there is always some connecting relations. Explaining this Prof. Bowra writes in *The Romantic Imagination* : "When in a fit of irritation, or anger *The Ancient Mariner* shoots the alabatross, he commits a heinous crime and is punished by the doom of 'life-in-death', which means that after being haunted by the presence of his dead comrades, he carries a gnawing memory to the end of his days. His shipmates too are the victims of the same laws when they are doomed to death as accom-

plices in his crimes for saying that he was right to kill the bird. In such a system it is no less appropriate that when the Mariner feels love gushing from his heart at the sight of water snakes he begins to break the first horror of his spell, and the albatross falls from his neck. Once we accept the assumption that it is wrong to kill an albatross, the rest of the action follows with an inexorable fatality. It is true that this assumption is perhaps the hardest which *The Ancient Mariner* demands of us, but of that Wordsworth was in no position to complain; it was he who suggested the idea to Coleridge."

2. **Coleridge as the Poet of Nature.** Coleridge occupies an important place among the nature poets of England. Like Wordsworth he was an acute observer of natural scenes, but he described them not directly, but through a veil of mystery. He looked upon nature as animate, living and having an intelligence of its own, and thus his descriptions of natural scenes are highly imaginative. Of such imaginative treatment of landscape there is no better instance than the description of the Dell in *Fears in Solitude* :

> A great and silent spot amid the hills
> A small and silent dell ! Over stiller place
> No singing skylark ever poised himself—
>
> But the dell
> Bathed by the mist is fresh and delicate
> As vernal cornfield on the unripe flax
> When, through its half transparent stalks, at eve,
> The level sunshine glimmers with green light.

Coleridge was particularly interested in the colourful and glittering things in nature. *The Ancient Mariner* is full of images of light and luminous colour in sky and sea. For example,

> About, about, in reel and rout
> The death fires dances at night ;
> The water, like a witch's oils
> Burnt green, and blue and white.
>
> The western wave was all a flame,
> The day was well nigh done !
> Almost upon the western wave
> Rested the broad bright sun.

Sometimes Coleridge, like Wordsworth, philosophises about Nature. In *Frost at Midnight*, he looks upon Nature as the eternal language of God, and he believes that God teaches us through Nature. Therefore in order to be in contact with God, we must live in the midst of natural scenes and enjoy them thoroughly :

But *thou*, my babe, shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
With images in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags : so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself
Great Universal Teacher ! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Sometimes Coleridge believes that Nature reflects our moods. When we are happy, Nature seems to be happy ; but when we are sad, Nature also appears to be sad and gloomy. This view is opposed to Wordsworth's view about Nature that she is always ready to console us. Addressing Dorothy, Wordsworth's sister, Coleridge says in *Dejection : An Ode* :

O Lady ! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live :
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud !

In case we want to read more in Nature than is possible for ordinary people, then from our own soul there must come a light or glory :—

And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
  Than that inanimate cold world allow'd
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
  Ah ! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, fair luminous cloud
  Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
  A sweet potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element.

(*b*) **The Scott Group.** The romantic poets belonging to the Scott group are **Sir Walter Scott, Campbell** and **Thomas Moore.** They bridged the years which preceded the second outburst of high creative activity in the Romantic period.

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) was the first to make romantic poetry popular among the masses. His *Marmion* and *Lady of Lake* gained greater popularity than the poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge, which were read by a select few. But in his poetry we do not find the deeply imaginative and suggestive quality which is at the root of poetic excellence. It is its story element, the narrative power,

which absorbs the reader's attention. That is why they are more popular with young readers. Moreover, Scott's poetry appeals on account of its vigour, youthful abandon, vivid pictures, heroic characters, rapid action and succession of adventures. His best known poems are *The Lady of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake*, *Rokeby*, *The Lord of the Isles*. All of them recapture the atmosphere of the Middle Ages, and breathe an air of supernaturalism and superstitions. After 1815 Scott wrote little poetry and turned to prose romance in the form of the historical novel in which field he earned great and enduring fame.

Thomas Campbell (1774-1844) and **Thomas Moore** (1779-1852) were prominent among a host of minor poets who following the vogue of Scott wrote versified romance. Campbell wrote *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809) in the Spenserian stanza, which does not hold so much interest today as his patriotic war songs—*Ye Mariners of England*, *Hohenlinden*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, and ballads such as *Lord Ullin's Daughter*. The poems of Moore are now old-fashioned and have little interest for modern reader. He wrote a long series of *Irish Melodies*, which are musical poems, vivacious and sentimental. His *Lalla Rookh* is a collection of Oriental tales in which he employs luscious imagery. Though Moore enjoyed immense popularity during his time, he is now considered as a minor poet of the Romantic Age.

(*c*) **The Younger Group.** To the younger group of Romantic poets belong **Byron, Shelley** and **Keats.** They represent the second flowering of English Romanticism, the first being represented by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. Though the younger group was in many ways indebted to the older group and also akin to it, yet the poets of the younger group show some sharp differences with the poets of the older group. It was because the revolutionary ideals which at first attracted Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey and then repelled them, had passed into the blood of Byron and Shelley. They were the children of the revolution and their humanitarian ardour affected even Keats who was more of an artist. Moreover, compared to the poets of the older group, the poets of the younger group were not only less national, but they were also against the historic and social traditions of England. It is not without significance that Byron and Shelley lived their best years, and produced their best poetry in Italy ; and Keats was more interested in Greek mythology than in the life around him. Incidentally, these three poets

of the second generation of Romanticism—died young—Byron at the age of thirty-six, Shelley thirty, and Keats twenty-five. So the spirit of youthful freshness is associated with their poetry.

BYRON
(1788-1824)

During his time **Lord George Gordon Byron** was the most popular of all Romantic poets, and he was the only one who made an impact on the continent both in his own day and for a long time afterwards. This was mainly due to the force of his personality and the glamour of his career, but as poetry does not possess the high excellence that we find in Shelley's and Keats's, now he is accorded a lower position in the hierarchy of Romantic poets. He is the only Romantic poet who showed regard for the poets of the eighteenth century, and ridiculed his own contemporaries in his early satirical poems, *English Bards and Scottish Reviewers* (1809). That is why he is called the "Romantic Paradox".

Byron who had travelled widely captured the imagination of his readers by the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812). This work made him instantly famous. As he said himself, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous." In it he described the adventures of a glamorous but sinister hero through strange lands. He also gave an air of authenticity to these adventures and a suggestion that he himself had indulged in such exploits. Such a hero, called the Byronic hero, became very popular among the readers and there was greater and greater demand for such romances dealing with his exploits. Under the pressure of the popular demand Byron wrote a number of romances which began whith *The Giaor* (1813), and in all of them he dealt with the exploits of the Byronic hero. But whereas these romances made his reputation not in England alone, but throughout Europe, the pruder section of the English society began to look upon him with suspicion, and considered him a dangerous, sinister man. The result was that when his wife left him in 1816, a year after his marriage, there was such a turn in the tide of public opinion against him that he left England under a cloud of distrust and disappointment, and never returned.

It was during the years of his exile in Italy that the best part of his poetry was written by him. The third and fourth cantos of *Childe Harold* (1816-1818) have more sincerity, and are in every way better expression of Byron's genius. He also wrote two sombre and self-conscious tragedies—*Manfred* and *Cain*. But the greatness of

Byron as a poet lies, however, not in these poems and tragedies, but in the satires which begin with *Beppo* (1818) and include *The Vision of Judgment* (1822) and *Don Juan* (1819-24). Of these *Don Juan*, which is a scathing criticism of the contemporary European society, is one of the greatest poems in the English language. In it humour, sentiment, adventure and pathos are thrown together in a haphazard manner as in real life. It is written in a conversational style which subtly produces comic as well as satirical effect.

Of all the romantic poets Byron was the most egoistical. In all his poems his personality obtrudes itself, and he attaches the greatest importance to it. Of the romantic traits, he represents the revolutionary iconoclasm at its worst, and that is why he came in open conflict with the world around him. His last great act, dying on his way to take part in the Greek War of Independence, was a truly heroic act ; and it vindicated his position for all times and made him a martyr in the cause of freedom.

Byron does not enjoy a high reputation as a poet because of his slipshod and careless style. He was too much in a hurry to revise what he had written, and so there is much in his poetry which is artistically imperfect. Moreover, his rhetorical style, which was admirably suited to convey the force and fire of his personality, often becomes dull and boring.

Byron attained a European reputation which no other Romantic poet enjoyed. It was perhaps on account of his forceful personality, his love, for liberty, and his rendering of the exile's temper and temperament that captured the imagination of men of high calibre, as Goethe, and Mazzini. But the English critics during the romantic period found much in his poetry which was not admirable, and the Victorians did not like him for his lack of depth.

Writing about *Don Juan*, Goethe the great German writer, wrote in 1819 : "*Don Juan* is a work of boundless genius, manifesting the bitterest and most savage hatred of humanity, and then again penetrated with the deepest and tenderest love for mankind. As we already know and esteem the author and would not have him other than he is, we gratefully enjoy what with excessive licence, nay with audacity, he dares to set before us. The technical handling of the verse is quite in harmony with the strange, wild ruthless content ; the poet spares his language as little as he spares humanity ; and as we approach closer we become aware that English poetry is already in possession of something we Germans totally lack ; a cultured comic language...

"Lord Byron is to be regarded as a man, as an Englishman and as a great talent. His good qualities derive in the main from the man ; his bad from the fact that he was an Englishman and a peer of England ; and his talent was incommensurable."

Mazzini, the great Italian patriot who admired Byron as the ruthless critic of all hypocricy and champion of liberty, wrote in the essay *Byron and Goethe* (1839) : "Byron takes his types from among those privileged by strength, beauty, and individual power. They are grand, poetical, heroic, but solitary. Each of them is the personification, slightly modified, of a single type, a single idea—the *individual* ; free, but nothing more than free ; such as the epoch now closing has made him...Gifted with a liberty they know not how to use ; with a power and energy they know not how to apply ; with a life whose purpose and aim they comprehend not ; they drag their useless and convulsed existence. Byron destroys them one after the other, as if he were the executioner of a sentence decreed by heaven. This, for those who can read with the soul's eyes, is what Byron sings ; or rather what Humanity sings through him. The emptiness of the life and death of solitary individuality has never been so powerfully and efficaciously summed up as in the pages of Byron.

"The day will come when democracy will remember all that it owes to Byron, England too, will, I hope, one day remember the mission—so entirely English, yet hitherto overlooked by her—which Byron fulfilled on the Continent ; the European role given by him to English literature, and the appreciation and sympathy for England which he awakened for us.

"Before he came, all that was known of English literature was the French translation of Shakespeare, and the anathema (curse) hurled by Voltaire against the 'intoxicated barbarian' (Shakespeare). It is since Byron that we continentalists have learned to study Shakespeare and other English writers. From him dates the sympathy of all the true-hearted amongst us for this land of liberty, whose true vocation he so worthily represented among the oppressed. He led the genius of Britain on a pilgrimage throughout Europe."

But the English critics and writers found much that was superficial in Byron. In his letter to his brother, Keats wrote (1819) : "You speak of Lord Byron and me. There is this great difference between us. He describes what he sees, I describe what I imagine. Mine is the hardest task."

Wordsworth whom Byron very often ridiculed, remarked : "Lord Byron has spoken severely of my compositions. However faulty they may be, I do not think that I ever could have prevailed upon myself to print such lines as he has done. Byron seems to me deficient in feeling.

Hazlitt in *The Spirit of Age* (1825) wrote about Byron :

"*Intensity* is the great and prominent distinction of Lord Byron's writings. He seldom gets beyond force of style, nor has produced any regular work or masterly whole. He does not prepare any plan beforehand, nor revise and retouch what he has written with polished accuracy. His only object seems to be to stimulate himself and his readers for the moment—to keep both alive, to drive away *ennui*, to substitute a feverish and irritable state of excitement for listless indolence or even calm enjoyment. For this purpose he pitches on any subject at random without much thought or delicacy—he is only impatient to begin—and takes care to adorn and enrich it as he proceeds with 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn'. He composes (as he himself had said) whether he is in the bath, in his study, or on horseback—he writes as habitually as others talk and think—and whether we have the inspiration of the Muse or not, *we always find the spirit of the man of genius breathing from his verse.* He grapples with his subject, and moves, penetrates, and animates it by the electric force of his own feelings. He is often monotonous, extravagant, offensive ; but he is never dull, or tedious, but when he writes prose. Lord Byron does not exhibit a new view of nature, or raise insignificant objects into importance by the romantic association with which he surrounds them ; but generally (at least) takes commonplace thoughts and events, and endeavours to express them in stronger and statelier language than others. He does not, like Wordsworth, lift poetry from the ground, or create a sentiment out of nothing. He does not describe a daisy or a periwinkle, but the cedar or the cypress : not 'poor men's cottages, but princes' palaces'. His *Childe Harold* contains a lofty and impassioned review of the great events of history, of the mighty objects left as wrecks of time, but he dwells chiefly on what is familiar to the mind of every schoolboy ; has brought out few new traits of feeling or thought ; and has done no more than justice to the reader's preconceptions by the sustained force and brilliance of his style and imagery...

"The *Don Juan* indeed has great power ; but its power is owing to the force of the serious writing, and to the oddity of the contrast

between that and the flashy passages with which it is interladed...... The Noble Lord is almost the only writer who has prostituted his talent in this way. He hallows in order to desecrate ; takes pleasure in defacing the images of beauty his hand wrought ; and raises our hopes and our beliefs in goodness to heaven only to dash them to earth again, and break them in pieces the more effectively from the height they have fallen. Our enthusiasm for genius or virtue is thus turned into a jest by the very person who has kindled it, and who thus fatally quenches the spark of both. It is not that Lord Byron is sometimes serious and sometimes trifling, sometimes profligate, and sometimes moral—but when he is most serious and most moral, he is only preparing to mortify the unsuspecting reader by putting a pitiful *hoax* upon him. This is a most unaccountable anomaly. It is as if the eagle were to build its eyry in a common sewer, or the owl were seen soaring to the mid-day sun.

"In fact Lord Byron is the spoiled child of fame as well as fortune. He has taken a surfeit of popularity, and is not contented to delight, unless he can shock the public. He would force them to admire in spite of decency and common sense—he would have them read what they would read in no one but himself, or he would not give a rush for their applause."

During the Victorian period, Byron's reputation fell considerably. For example, Henry Taylor wrote in 1834 : "Poetry of which sense is not the basis, though it may be excellent of its kind, will not long be reputed to be poetry of the highest order. It may move the feelings and charm the fancy, but failing to satisfy the understanding, it will not take permanent possession of the strongholds of fame. Lord Byron, in giving the most admirable example of this species of poetry, undoubtedly gave the strongest impulse to the appetite for it. Yet the impulse is losing its force, and even Lord Byron himself repudiated, in the later years of his life, the poetical taste which he had espoused and propagated.

"Had he united a philosophical intellect to his peculiarly poetical temperament, he would probably have been the greatest poet of his age. But no man can be a very great poet which is not also a great philosopher. Whatever Lord Byron's natural powers may have been, idleness and light reading, an early acquisition of popularity by the exercise of a single talent, and an absorbing and contracting love, confined the field of his operation within narrow limits. Nor does he appear at any time to have betaken himself to such studies

as would have tended to the cultivation and discipline of his reasoning powers, or the enlargement of his mind. He had, however, not only an ardent and brilliant imagination, but a clear understanding; and the signs of both of what he had and of what he wanted, are apparent in his poetry. There is apparent in it a working and moulding spirit, with a want of material to work up,—a great command of language, with a want of any views or reflections which, if unembelished by imagery, or unassociated with passionate feelings, it would be very much worthwhile to express.

"Lord Byron's conception of a hero is an evidence, not only of scanty materials of knowledge from which to construct the ideal of a human being, but also of a want of perception of what is great or noble in our nature. His heroes are creatures abandoned to their passions, and essentially, therefore, weak of mind. Strip them of the veil of mystery and the trappings of poetry, resolve them into their plain realities, and they are such beings as, in the eyes of a man of masculine judgment, would certainly excite no sentiment of admirations, even if they did not provoke contempt."

Matthew Arnold, however, considered Byron superior to Shelley and Keats—inferior only to Wordsworth among the Romantic poets. In his essay, *The Poetry of Byron* (1881), he wrote: "To the poetry of Byron the world has ardently paid homage; full justice from his contemporaries perhaps more than justice, his torrent of poetry received. His poetry was admired, adored, 'with all its imperfections on its head',—in spite of negligence, in spite of diffuseness, in spite of repetitions, in spite of whatever faults it possessed. Nevertheless the hour of irresistible vogue has passed away for him; even for Byron it could not but pass away. The time has come for him, as it comes for all poets, when he must take his real and permanent place, no longer depending upon the vogue of his own day and upon the enthusiasm of his contemporaries. Whatever we may think of him, we shall not be subjugated by him as they were; for, as he cannot be for us what he was for them, we cannot admire him so hotly and indiscriminately as they. His faults of negligence, of diffuseness, of repetition, his faults of whatever kind, we shall abundantly feel and unsparingly criticise; the mere interval of time between us and him makes disillusion of this kind inevitable.

"Now if we take the two parts of Goethe's criticism of Byron, the favourable and the unfavourable, and put them together, we shall have, I think, the truth. On the one hand, a splendid and

puissant personality—a personality 'in eminence such as has never been yet, and is not likely to come again' ; of which the like, therefore, is not to be found among the poets of our nation, by which Byron 'is different from the rest, and in the main greater.' Byron is, moreover, 'the greatest talent of the century.' On the other hand, this splendid personality and unmatched talent, this unique Byron complete; and in estimating him and ranking him we have to strike a balance between the gain which accrues to his poetry, as compared with the productions of other poets, from his superiority, and the loss which accrues it from his defects.

"True, as a man, Byron could not manage himself, could not guide his ways right, but was all astray. True, he has no light, cannot lead us from the past to the future; 'the moment he reflects, he is a child'. The way out of the false state of things which enraged him he did not see—the slow and laborious way upward; he had not the patience, knowledge, self-discipline, virtue, requisite for seeing it. True, also, as a poet, he has no fine and exact sense of word and structure and rhythm; he has not the artist's nature and gifts. Yet a personality of Byron's force counts for so much in life, and a rhetorician of Byron's force counts for so much in literature ! But it would be unjust to label Byron as a rhetorician only. Along with his astounding power and passion he had a strong and deep sense for what is beautiful in nature, and for what is beautiful in human action and suffering.

"I place Wordsworth's poetry above Byron's on the whole, although in some points he was greatly Byron's inferior, and although Byron's poetry will always, probably, find more readers than Wordsworth's, and will give pleasure more easily. But these two, Wordsworth and Byron, stand, it seems to me, first and pre-eminent in actual performance, a glorious pair, among the English poetry of this century. Keats had probably, indeed, a more consummate poetic gift than either of them; but he died having produced too little and being as yet too immature to rival them. I for my part can never even think of equalling with them any other of their contemporaries; either Coleridge, poet and philosopher wrecked in a mist of opium; or Shelley, beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain. Wordsworth and Byron stand out by themselves. When the year 1900 is turned, and our nations comes to recount her poetic glories, the first names with her will be these."

In the twentieth century critics have arrived at a more balanced assessment of Byron's poetry apart from his personality which had been given too much importance by the earlier critics. For example, T.S. Eliot in his essay, *Byron* (1937), has observed : "The qualities of narrative verse which are found in *Don Juan* are no less remarkable in the earlier tales. They are readable. However absurd we find their view of life, they are, as tales, very well told. As a tale-teller we must rate Byron very high indeed : I can think of none other than Chaucer who has a greater readability, with the exception of Coleridge whom Byron abused and from whom Byron learned a great deal. And Coleridge never achieved a narrative of such length. Byron's plots, if they deserve that name, are extremely simple. What makes the tales interesting is first a torrential fluency of verse and a skill in varying it from time to time to avoid monotony; and second a genius for divagation. Digression, indeed, is one of the valuable arts of the story-tellers. The effect of Byron's digression is to keep us interested in the story-teller himself, and through this interest to interest us more in the story. On contemporary readers this interest must have been strong to the point of enchantment; for even still, once we submit ourselves to the point of reading a poem through, the attraction of the personality is powerful.

"It is all the more difficult, in a period which has rather lost the appreciation of the kind of virtues to be found in Byron's poetry, to analyse accurately his faults and vices. Hence we fail to give credit to Byron for the instinctive art by which, in a poem like *Childe Harold* and still more efficiently in *Beppo* or *Don Juan*, he avoids monotony by a dextrous turn from one subject to another. He has the cardinal virtue of being never dull.......

"What puts the last Canto of *Don Juan* at the head of Byron's works is, I think, that the subject matter gave him at last an adequate object for a genuine emotion. The emotion is hatred of hypocrisy; and if it was reinforced by more personal and petty feelings, the feelings of the man who as a boy had known the humiliation of shabby lodgings with an accentric mother, who remained oddly alien among the society he knew so well—this mixture of the origin of his attitude towards English society only gives it greater intensity. And the hypocrisy of the world that he satirised was at the opposite extreme of his own. Hypocrite, indeed, except in the original sense of the word, is hardly the term for Byron. He was an actor who devoted immense trouble to *becoming* a role that he adopted; his superficiality was some-

thing that he created for himself. It is difficult, in considering Byron's poetry, not to be drawn into an analysis of the man : but much more attention has already been devoted to the man than to the poetry, and I prefer, to keep the latter in the foreground. My point is that Byron's satire upon English society, in the latter part of *Don Juan*, is something for which I can find no parallel in English literature. He was right in making the hero of his house-party a Spaniard, for what Byron understands and dislikes about English society is very much what an intelligent foreigner in the same position would understand and dislike."

Now let us examine the main characteristics of Byron as a poet :—

1. **Byron's Personality.** Byron possessed a towering personality, and it was mainly on account of this that he was looked upon as the representative of his age in Europe. When the French Revolution broke the equilibrium on which the civilisation of the eighteenth century rested, a new type of man came into existence, and Byron was the sepreme example of it in his rejection of established ties, his cult of the self, his love of adventure, and his ironical distrust of his own emotion and beliefs. He was an aristocratic rebel when aristocrats were leaders of new movements and new ideas. In him the poet became a man of action.

There seemes to be an element of morbidity at the very centre of Byron's personality, which was disintegrated on account of the absence of organic discipline among the motives and the acts. He was a highly energetic person, but he could not completely master himself. In his life and work there was an essential duality. There was a mixture of sincerity and insincerity in his character. He was the representative of the European type of the Romantic artist whose art fed on his very disease, who took a voluptuous delight in self-reproach, and who wove his remorse into a texture of beauty.

Byron's divided nature regained its self-mastery in creative activities. Art for Byron was the full and true life through which all his tendencies could work together in easy unity. The last demonstration of his haughty courage and the circumstances of his death, show him also fully active, sure of himself, and reconciled with his conscience. And the moral unrest of his stormy career cannot dim the splendour of a personality so admirably vigorous and richly endowed.

Byron was both highly imaginative and deeply realistic. He loved the world for its own sake, good and evil. Whatever is best in his work is full of raw and naked humanity. He thus created a new kind of poetry of the world, written rebelliously, but by a man to whom the world was one reality. It was because the customs and conventions of the world were so real to him that he could criticise them so well. It was anger which first made him a poet. The first lines of verse he ever wrote were written at the age of nine, against an old lady whom he disliked; and when the weak and insincere sentimentalities of the 'Hours of Idleness' had been severely criticised, the feelings of revenge turned him into a satirist. His other poems were directed against society which did not treat him well.

2. **Byron—the Romantic Paradox.** Byron occupies a peculiar position in English Romanticism. From the European point of view, he was the chief exponent and most renowned figure of the whole movement—the men who summed up in himself its essential qualities, and by his inspiring example imposed them on the civilised world. From the usual English point of view, he was hardly a Romantic at all, but a survival from the eighteenth century, and enemy of much that the true Romantics thought most holy.

Byron was thus different from the other romantic poets of England. Profoundly touched at certain points by romanticism, Byron was never a poet of romanticism in the sense that Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats were. Like Wordsworth he was deeply touched by its influence at one moment, but he was far away at the next. Of all the great poets of the time, Byron presented the peculiar and interesting combination of an ardent romantic imagination, and an intellect and outlook essentially worldly and matter-of-fact. With Keats it was the past, with Shelley the future, with Byron it was the present that really interested and gripped him. His ardent fancy dallied with the past on occasion, for example, in his Romances; but he was most at home with the England of his day, its social hypocrisies, its literary conventions and affectations. He was always at heart a society gentleman, and both in its good and bad sense, a man of the world. Here is an explanation of his genuine admiration for Pope and the Popean method as described in his *English Bards and Scottish Reviewers.* His own slap-dash methods of writing were not after Pope, it is true, but he knew it better than he did, and he criticised his own slovenliness of writing and praised the careful finish and polish of Pope. No doubt, there is a

touch of personal malice in his early attacks on Wordsworth and his circle, and for this reason he exaggerated all that was anti-romantic in his nature. But, while making allowance for all this, there was real sincerity in his critical attitude, and real value also at a time when romanticism was at its height, and when the eighteenth century poets suffered a good deal of undeserved condemnation.

When the romantic principles of the new school seemed everywhere truimphant, Byron came forward as the dauntless champion of Pope, and when he attempted to write drama, he turned his back upon Shakespeare. Byron was ever of the opposition, and to many his championship of classicism was a pose of perversity; but a close study of his work seems to show that, while much of his poetry is essentially romantic in spirit, and even enlarges the horizon of romanticism, he never wholly broke away from the Angustan poetic diction.

Thus Byron differed fundamentally from other Romantic poets. On the central article of Romantic creed, the importance of the imagination, Byron was regarded as a heretic by such good judges as Keats and Blake and he would not have denied the accusation. It is not surprising that among his contemporaries he was treated as an undesirable alien in the world of English poetry. But he worked by different standards and would not have been troubled by such criticisms. In rejecting the imagination he obeyed a deep conviction, and this rejection inspired his best work and won him a special place among the poets of his time.

Byron differs from the authentic Romantics not merely in his low estimate of the imagination, but in the peculiar quality and power of his wit. Indeed, his wit rises largely from his loss of belief in the imagination. Once he ceased to believe in the reality or the relevance of his wilder invention, he turned on himself and laughed. All these fine ideas, he seems to say, are rather ridiculous : We have only to look at them in practice to see what they mean and how unlike the reality is to the dream. Of course, such a point of view was a natural product of the high society in which Byron had lived.

Byron differed from his Romantic contemporaries in the complex character of his response to experience. In his early poetry he had tried to look at things from about a single point of view, but in *Don Juan* he abandoned this and exploited the whole range of his feelings. Whereas the other Romantics tended to follow a single principle in their approach to life, Byron followed his own, wayward,

changing moods. Just as the Romantics were in their own way perfectly true to themselves, so was Byron in his, but his nature was more complicated than theirs and could not be confined to a single channel. If he lacks their simplicity and the special power which comes with it, he makes up for this by the range of his taste, and the wonderful variety of his response. Of course, the result is that he misses the peculiar intensity of the Romantics, but he makes much of many themes which are beyond their reach, and gives in *Don Juan* a panorama of contemporary life which is much richer than anything they could have provided.

But, in spite of his differences with the Romantic poets, Byron was the child of his age. Though he abandoned the Romantic view of the imagination and practised a new realistic art, he did not altogether abandon some themes and ideas which meant most to the Romantics, for example, love and nature. The new age had formed in him tastes which he could not abandon and which dictated the course of his life. His political ideas were not those of the Augustans, but were the product of the French Revolution. He was more typical of his time than either Wordsworth or Shelley, for while their outlooks were limited by their private philosophies, Byron absorbed the life around him and expressed what thousands of his contemporaries felt. Indeed, so wide was his understanding that he is a poet not merely of England but of all Europe.

3. **The Byronic Hero.** Byron had the habit of projecting himself in his works. All his heroes—Childe Harold, Manfred, Don Juan and the central figures of his Romances—possess typical characteristics of Byron himself. The Byronic hero for the first time appeared in *Childe Harold.* In the manuscript the hero's name was first written as Childe Burun (an old form of Byron), so that an identification between the hero and author was obvious. Byron later obscured it by altering the names and uttering denials. But it is clear enough that Childe Harold is simply the first of many fancy portraits of himself. All the features that are soon to become so familiar—that fatal ancestry, the excesses, the satiety—are celebrated in the first few stanzas:

> For he through sin's long labyrinth had run,
> Nor made atonement when he did amiss,
> Had sighed to many though he loved but one,
> And that loved one, alas ! could ne'er be his,
> Ah, happy she! too escape from him whose kiss
> Had been pollution unto aught so chaste ;

> Who soon had left her charms for vulgar bliss,
> And spoiled her goodly land to gild his waste ;
> Nor calm domestic peace had ever designed to taste.

This kind of hero has, of course his literary ancestors. The pride and evil go back to Milton's Satan, the gloom and the peculiar relation to women to some of the heroes of the novel of terror. But the special Byronic contribution is the interweaving into fictitious images of a number of more or less personal details, so that a *shifting*, but ever-present relationship between self-portraiture and fantasy is set up. It was this romantic self-portraiture that was to have such an extensive effect on the romanticism of Europe. By its means Byron was able to exploit his personality to the full, without being tied within the limits of the authentic confession.

All, or almost all, Byron's heroes have minds which seem at variance with their fortunes ; a keen sense of what is noble and honourable, and an equally keen susceptibility of injustice or injury, under the garb of stoicism or contempt of mankind. The strength of early passion, and the glow of youthful feeling, are uniformly painted as chilled or subdued by a train of early imprudences or of darker guilt, and the sense of enjoyment tarnished by too intimate and experienced an acquaintance with the vanity of human wishes. These general attributes mark the stern features of all Byron's heroes.

Byron was himself the beginning, the middle, and the end, of all his own poetry, the hero of every tale, the chief object in every landscape. Harold, Lara, Manfred, and a crowd of other characters were universally considered merely as loose incognitos of Byron ; and there is every reason to believe that he meant them to be so considered.

Byron was a man of great sensibility. He had been ill-educated ; he suffered in his boyhood ; he had been severely criticised for his early literary productions ; his financial position was not satisfactory ; he was unfortunate in his domestic relations ; the public treated him with cruel injustice ; his health and spirits suffered from his dissipated habits of life ; he was, on the whole, an unhappy man. He early discovered that by parading his unhappiness before the multitude, he produced an immense sensation. The world gave him every encouragement to talk about his mental sufferings. The interest which his first confession excited induced him to effect much that he did not feel ; and the affection probably

reacted on his feelings. How far the character in which he exhibited himself was genuine, and how far theatrical, it would probably have puzzled himself to say.

4. **Byron's Insincerity.** Byron was fundamentally a man of action, who had to express himself in poetry which did not satisfy all his faculties. He did not have a high opinion about the profession of a poet. Writing of a gentleman who had published a book of verse, Byron wrote : "God help him : no one should be a rhymer who could do anything better." And again more deliberately he wrote : "I by no means rank poetry or poets high in the scale of intellect. This may look like affectation, but it is my real opinion. It is the lava of the imagination, whose eruption prevents an earthquake—I prefer the talent of action." On account of this some critics have charged him with insincerity. They think that he was a poser who did not write from conviction.

"The lava of imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake, is indeed precisely what poetry was to Byron ; and it is characteristic of him that he cannot look beyond himself even for the sake of a generalisation. If we would define yet more precisely his ideal we must turn to the following stanza of *Childe Harold* :

> Could I embody and unbosom now
> That which is most within me,—could I wreak
> My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
> Soul—heart—mind—passions—feelings—strong or weak
> All that I would have sought, and all I seek
> Bear—know—feel—and yet breathe—into one word,
> And that one word were Lightning, I would speak.

Byron had no positive opinion about his own works. Sending the manuscript of *Manfred* to Murray he wrote : "I have not an idea if it is a good or bad—you may put it into the fire if you like." Sending the first part of *Heaven and Earth*, he wrote : "I wish the first part to be published before the second, because if it don't succeed, it is better to stop there than to go on in a fruitless experiment." Such indifference, and such dependence on outside judgment, show us Byron's lack of conviction, reverence and serious feeling for art.

But the fact that Byron was ready to discuss his inner feelings before the public proves that he was sincere, and it is this characteristic which is at the root of his greatness as a poet. In fact Byron was fundamentally sincere, and that quality makes him one

of the greatest poets of England. He speaks to humanity in its own voice, heightened to a pitch which carries it across Europe. No poet had ever seemed to speak to men so directly, and it was through this directness of his vision of the world, and of his speech about it, that he became a poet, and introduced a new element in poetry *i.e.*, the expression of the poet's complex personality.

Swinburne, who considered Byron as fundamentally a sincere poet, remarked : "The time was when all boys and girls who paddled in rhyme and dabbled in sentiments were wont to adore the presence or the memory of Byron with foolish faces of praise. It is of little account to him or to us that they have long since ceased to crackle and begun to hiss. They have become used to better verse and carefuller workmen, and must be forgiven if after much training they cannot at once appreciate the splendid and imperishable excellence which covers all his offences and outweighs all his defects: *the excellence of sincerity and strength.* Without these no poet can live ; but few have ever had so much of them as Byron. His sincerity indeed is difficult to discover and define ; but it does in effect lie at the root of all his good works : deformed by pretensions and defaced by assumptions, masked by folly and veiled by affection ; but perceptible after all, and priceless."

SHELLEY

(1792—1822)

Whereas Byron was the greatest interpreter of revolutionary iconoclasm, Shelley was the revolutionary idealist, a prophet of hope and faith. He was a visionary who dreamed of the Golden Age. Unlike Byron's genius which was destructive, Shelley's was constructive, and he incarnated that aspect of the French Revolution which aimed at building up a new and beautiful edifice on the ruins of the old and the ugly. Whereas Byron's motive impulse was pride, Shelley's was love.

In his early days Shelley came under the influence of William Godwin's *Political Justice.* He saw that all established institutions, kings and priests were diverse forms of evil and obstacles to happiness and progress. The essence of all his poetical works is his prophecy of the new-born age. In his first long poem, *Queen Mab*, which he wrote when he was eighteen, he condemns kings, governments, church, property, marriage and Christianity. *The Revolt of Islam* which followed in 1817, and is a sort of transfigured picture of the French

Revolution, is charged with the young poet's hopes for the future regeneration of mankind. In 1820 appeared *Prometheus Unbound*, the hymn of human revolt triumphing over the oppression of false gods. In this superb lyrical drama we find the finest and fullest expression of Shelley's faith and hope. Here Prometheus stands forth as the prototype of mankind in its long struggle against the forces of despotism, symbolised by Jove. At least Prometheus is united to Asia, the spirit of love and goodness in nature, and everything gives promise that they shall live together happy ever afterwards.

Shelley's great poems are *Alastor* (1816), in which he describes his pursuit of an unattainable ideal of beauty ; *Julian and Meddalo* (1818) in which he draws his own portrait contrasted with that of Byron ; *The Cenci*, a poetic drama which deals with the terrible story of Beatrice who, the victim of a father's lust, takes his life in revenge; the lyrical drama *Hallas* in which he sings of the rise of Greece against the Ottoman yoke ; *Epipsychidion* in which he celebrates his Platonic love for a beautiful young Italian girl ; *Adonais*, the best-known of Shelley's longer poems, which is an elegy dedicated to poet Keats, and holds its place with Milton's *Lycidas* and Tennyson's *In Memoriam* as one of the three greatest elegies in the English language ; and the unfinished masterpiece, *The Triumph of Life.*

Shelley's reputation as a poet rests mainly on his lyrical power. He is in fact the greatest lyrical poet of England. In all these poems mentioned above, it is their lyrical rapture which is unique. In the whole of English poetry there is no utterance as spontaneous as Shelley's, and nowhere does the thought flow with such irresistible melody. Besides these longer poems Shelley wrote a number of small lyrics of exquisite beauty, such as 'To Constantia Singing', the 'Ozymandias' sonnet. It is in fact on the foundation of these beautiful lyrics, which are absolutely consummate and unsurpassed in the whole range of English poetry, that Shelley's real reputation as a poet lies.

As the poet of Nature, Shelley was inspired by the spirit of love which was not limited to mankind, but to every living creature—to animals and flowers, to elements, to the whole Nature. He is not content, like Wordsworth, merely to love and revere Nature ; his very being is fused with the universe. He, therefore, holds passionate communion with the universe, and becomes one with the lark (*To the Skylark*), with the cloud (*The Cloud*), and west wind (*Ode to the West Wind*), to which he utters forth this passionate, lyrical appeal :

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is ;
What if my leaves are falling like its own !
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce
My spirit ! Be thou me, impetuous one.

Since his time Shelley's poetry has been highly praised as well as severely condemned. As many of his ideas—like opposition to dogmatic religion and political subjugation—have lost their force now, because of the liberal views of the people, Shelley's reputation has been steadily declining. His poetry is often charged with the want of substance in it.

Leigh Hunt in *Imagination and Fancy* (1844) wrote about Shelley: "In general, if Coleridge is the sweetest of our poets, Shelley is at once the most ethereal and most gorgeous ; the one who has clothed his thoughts in draperies of the most evanescent and most magnificent words and imagery. Not Milton himself is more learned in Grecisms, or nicer in etymological propriety; and nobody has a style so Orphic and primeval. His poetry is as full of mountains, seas and skies, of light, and darkness, and the seasons, and all the elements of our being, as if Nature herself had written it, with the creations and its hopes newly cast around her ; not, it must be confessed, without too indiscriminate a mixture of great and small, and a want of sufficient shade—a certain chaotic brilliancy, 'dark with excess of light' Shelley (in the verses to a *Lady with a Guitar*) might well call himself Ariel. All the most enjoying part of this poetry is Ariel—the 'delicate' yet powerful 'spirit', jealous of restraint, yet able to serve ; living in the elements and the flowers ; treading the 'ooze' of the salt deep, and running 'on the sharp wind of the north', feeling for creatures unlike himself ; 'flaming amazement' on them too, and singing exquisite songs."

A contemporary critic, W. S. Walker, wrote in *Quarterly Review* (1821) about Shelley's poems : "If we might venture to express a general opinion of what far expresses our comprehension, we should compare the poems contained in the volume to the visions of gay colours mingled with darkness, which often in childhood, when we shut our eyes, seem to revolve at an immense distance around us. In Mr. Shelley's poetry all is brilliance, vacuity, and confusion. We are dazzled by the multitude of words which sound as if they denoted some thing very grand or splendid : fragments of images pass in crowd before us ; but when the procession has gone, and the tumult of it is over,

not a trace of it remains upon the memory. The mind, fatigued and perplexed, is mortified by the consciousness that its labour has not been rewarded by the acquisition of a single distinct conception ; the ear, too, is dissatisfied : for the rhythm of the verse is often harsh and unmusical ; and both the ear and the understanding are disgusted by new and uncouth words, and by the awkward and intricate construction of the sentences. The predominant characteristic of Mr. Shelley's poetry, however, is its frequent and total want of meaning."

Commenting on the poetry of Shelley, Hazlitt wrote in 1824 : "Mr. Shelley's style is to poetry what astrology is to natural science— a passionate dream, a straining after impossibilities, a record of fond conjectures, a confused embodying of vague abstractions—a fever of the soul, thirsting and craving after what it cannot have, indulging its love of power and novely at the expense of truth and nature, associating ideas by contraries, and wasting great powers by their application to unattainable objects.

"Poetry, we grant, creates a world of its own ; but it creates out of existing materials. Mr. Shelley is the maker of his own poetry—out of nothing. Not that he is deficient in the true sources of strength and beauty, if he had given himself fair play (the volume before us, as well as his other productions, contains many proofs to the contrary) ; but, in him, fancy, will, caprice, predominated over and absorbed the natural influences of things ; he had no respect for any poetry that did not strain the intellect as well as fire the imagination—and was not sublimed into a high spirit of metaphysical philosophy. Instead of giving a language to thought, or leading the heart a tongue, he utters dark sayings, and deals in allegories and riddles. His Muse offers her services to clothe shadowy doubts and inscrutable difficulties in a robe of glittering words, and to turn nature into a brilliant paradox. We thank him—but we must be excused. Where we see the dazzling beacon-lights streaming over the darkness of the abyss, we dread the quicksands and the rocks below. Mr. Shelley's mind was of 'fiery a quality' to repose (for any continuance) on the probable or the true—it soared beyond the visible diurnal sphere, 'to the strange, the improbable, and the imposible.' He mistook the nature of the poet's calling, which should be guided by involuntary not by voluntary impulses. He shook off, as an heroic and praiseworthy act, the trammels of sense, custom and sympathy, and became the creature of his own will. He was 'all air', disdaining the bars and ties of the mortal mould. He ransacked his brain for incongruities and believed in whatever

was incredible. Almost all is effort, almost all is extravagant, almost all is quaint, incomprehensible, and abortive, from aiming to be more than it is. Epithets are applied, because they do not fit : subjects are chosen because they are repulsive : the colours of his style, for their gaudy, changeful, startling effect, resemble the display of fire-works in the dark, and, like them, have neither durability, nor keeping, nor discriminating form. Yet Mr. Shelley, with all his faults, was a man of genius ; and we lament that uncontrollable violence of temperament which gave it a forced and false direction. He has simple thoughts of great force and depth, single images of rare beauty, detached passages of extreme tenderness ; and, in his smallar pieces, where he has attempted little he has done much. If some casual and interesting idea touched his feelings or struck his fancy, he expressed it in a pleasing and unaffected verse : but give him a larger subject and time to reflect, and he was sure to get entangled in a system. The fumes of vanity rolled volumes of smoke, mixed with sparkles of fire, from the cloudy tolerance of his thought The success of his writings is therefore in general in the inverse ratio of the extent of his undertakings : in as much as his desire to teach."

During the Victorian period, Browning was the greatest admirer of Shelley's poetry. In his *Essay on Shelley* (1852) he observed : "Whatever Shelley was, he was with an admirable sincerity. It was not always truth that he thought and spoke ; but in the purity of truth he spoke and thought always. Everywhere is apparent his belief in the existence of God, to which Evil is an accident; his faithful holding by what is assumed to be the former, going everywhere in company with the tenderest pity for those acting or suffering on the opposite hypothesis. For he was tender, though tenderness is not always the characteristic of very sincere natures ; he was eminently both tender and sincere.

"Gradually he was raised above the contemplation of spots and the attempt at effacing them to the great Abstract Light, and through the discrepancy of the creation to the sufficiency of the First Cause. Gradually he was learning that the best way of removing abuses is to stand fast by truth. Truth is one, as they are manifold ; and innumerable negative effects are produced by the upholding of one positive principle. I shall say what I think—had Shelley lived he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians ; his very instinct for helping the weaker side (if numbers make strength), his very 'hate of hate', which at first translated itself into delirious

Queen Mab notes and the like, would have got clear-sighted by exercise.

"Meantime, as I call Shelley a moral man, because he was true, simple-hearted and brave, and because what he acted corresponded to what he knew, so I call him a man of religious mind, because every audacious negative cast up by him against the Divine was interpenetrated with a mood of reverence and adoration—and because I find him everywhere taking for granted some of the capital dogmas of Christianity, while most vehemently denying their historical basement."

Regarding the merits of the poetry of Shelley, there raged a sharp controversy between Arnold and Swinburne. Arnold found faults with Shelley, whereas Swinburne showered praises on him. Arnold regarded Shelley inferior to Byron as well as Keats. In his critical essays he wrote : "As a man Shelley is at a number of points immeasurably Byron's superior ; he is a beautiful and enchanting spirit, whose vision, when we call it up, has far more loveliness, more charm for our soul, than the vision of Byron. But all the personal charm of Shelley cannot hinder us from at last discovering in his poetry the incurable fault, in consequence, of unsubstantiality. Those who extol him as the poet of clouds, the poet of sunsets, are only saying that he did not, in fact, lay hold upon the poet's right subject-matter ; and in honest truth, with all his charm of soul and spirit, and with all his gift of musical diction and movement, he never or hardly ever did...Shelley, beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain...

"Poetry is interpretation both by having *natural magic* in it, and by having *moral profundity*. In Shelley there is not a balance of the two gifts, nor even a co-existence of them, but there is a passionate straining after both, and this is, what makes Shelley, as a man, so interesting: I will not now inquire how much Shelley achieves as a poet, but whatever he achieves, he in general fails to achieve natural magic in his expression ; in Mr. Palgrave's charming *Treasury* may be seen a gallery of his failures. Compare, for example, his *Lines written in the Euganean Hills*, with Keats's *Ode to Autumn*. The latter piece *renders* Nature; the former *tries to render her*. I will not deny, however, that Shelley has natural magic in his rhythm ; what I deny is, that he has it in his language. It always seemed to me that the right sphere for Shelley's genius was the sphere of music, not of poetry; the medium of sounds he can master, but to master the more difficult

medium of words he has neither intellectual force enough nor sanity enough."

Swinburne, who considered Shelley as superior both to Byron and Keats, replied to the charges of Arnold: "I protest against the names of Byron and Shelley. With all reserve of reverence for the noble genius and memory of Byron, I can no more accept him as a poet equal or even akin to Shelley on any side but one, than I could imagine Shelley endowed with the various, fearless, keen-eyed and triumphant energy which makes the greatest of Byron's works so great. With all his glory of ardour and vigour and humour, Byron was a singer who could not sing; Shelley outsang all poets on record but some two or three throughout all time; his depths and lights of inner and outer music are as divine as nature's, and not sooner exhaustible. He was alone the perfect singing-god; his thoughts, words, deeds, all sang together.

"Mr. Arnold, in my view, misconceives and misjudges Shelley not less when set against Keats than when bracketed with Byron. Keats has indeed a divine magic of language applied to nature; here he is unapproachable; this is his throne and he may bid all kings of song come bow to it. But his ground is not Shelley's ground; they do not run in the same race at all. The *Ode to Autumn*, among other such poems of Keats, renders nature as no man but Keats ever could. Such poems as the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills* cannot compete with it. But do they compete with it? The poem of Keats, Mr. Arnold says, '*renders* Nature'; the poem of Shelley '*tries to render her*.' What Shelley tries to do he does; and he does not try to do the same thing as Keats. The comparison is as empty and profitless as one between the sonnets of Shakespeare and the sonnets of Milton. Shelley never in his life wrote a poem of that exquisite contraction and completeness, within the round and perfect limit. This poem of the Euganean Hills is no piece of spiritual sculpture or painting after the life of natural things. I do not pretend to assign it a higher or a lower place; I say simply that its place is not the same. It is a rhapsody of thought and feeling coloured by contact with nature, but not born of the contact; and such as it is all Shelley's work is, even when most vague and vast in its elemental scope of labour and aim. A soul as great as the world lays hold on the things of the world; on all life of plants, and beasts, and, men; on all likeness of time, and death, and good things and evil. His aim is rather to render the effect than the thing itself; the soul and spirit of life rather than the living form, the growth rather

than the thing grown. And herein Shelley too is unapproachable."

J. A. Symonds, in his book, *Shelley* (1879), giving a more balanced estimate of Shelley's poetry, wrote: "As a poet Shelley contributed a new quality to English literature—a quality of ideality, freedom, and spiritual audacity; which severe critics of other nations think we lack. Byron's daring is in a different region: his elemental worldliness and pungent satire do not liberate our energy, or cheer us with new hopes and splendid vistas. Wordsworth, the very antithesis to Shelley in his reverent accord with institutions, suits our meditative moods, sustains us with a sound philosophy, and braces as by healthy contact with the Nature he so dearly loved. But in Wordsworth there is none of Shelley's magnetism. What remains of permanent value in Coleridge's poetry—such work as *Christabel*, the *Ancient Mariner*, or *Kubla Khan*—is a product of pure artistic fancy, tempered by the author's mysticism. Keats, true and sacred poet as he was, loved nature with a somewhat sensuous devotion. She was for him a mistress rather than a goddess; nor did he share the prophetic fire which burns in Shelley's verse, quite apart from the direct enunciation of his favourite tenets. In none o. Shelley's greatest contemporaries was the lyrical faculty so permanent; and whether we consider his minor songs, his odes, or his more complicated choral dramas, we acknowledge that he was the loftiest and the most spontaneous singer of our language. In the range of power he was also conspicuous above the rest. Not only did he write the best lyrics, but the best tragedy, the best translations, the best familiar poems of his century. As a satirist and humorist, I cannot place him so high as some of his admirers do; and the purely polemical portions of his poems, those in which he puts forth his antagonisms to tyrants and religion and custom in all its myriad forms, seem to me to degenerate at intervals into poor rhetoric.

"While his genius was so varied and its flights so unapproached in swiftness, it would be vain to deny that Shelley as an artist, had faults from which the men with whom I have compared him were more free. The most prominent of these are haste, incoherence, verbal carelessness, incompleteness, a want of narrative force, and a weak hold on objective realities. Even his warmest admirers, if they are sincere critics, will concede that his verse, taken together, is marked by inequality. In his eager self-abandonment to inspiration, he produced much that is unsatisfying simply because it is not ripe. There was no defect of power in him, but a defect of patience; and the final word to be pronounced in estimating the larger bulk of his

poetry is immature. Not only was the poet young; but the fruit of his young mind had been plucked before it had been duly mellowed by reflection. Again, he did not care enough for common things to present them with artistic fulness. He was intolerant of detail and thus failed to model with the soundness that we find in Goethe's work. He flew at the grand, the spacious, the sublime; and did not always succeed in realising for his readers what he had imagined. A certain want of faith in his own powers, fostered by the extraordinary discouragement under which he had to write, prevented him from finishing what he began, or from giving that ultimate form of perfection to his larger works which he admired in shorter pieces like the *Ode to the West Wind.* When a poem was ready, he had it hastily printed, and passed on to fresh creative efforts. If anything occurred to interrupt his energy, he flung the sketch aside. Some of these defects, if we may use the word at all to indicate our sense that Shelley might by care have been made equal to his highest self, were in a great measure the correlative of his chief quality—the ideality of which I have already spoken. He composed with all his faculties, mental, emotional, and physical, at the utmost strain at a white heat of intense fervour, striving to attain one object, the truest and most passionate investiture for the thoughts which had inflamed his ever-quick imagination. The result is that his finest work has more the stamp of something natural and elemental—the wind, the sea, the depth of air—than of a mere artistic product."

It is clear from the extracts from criticism given above, that Shelley was different from all other Romantic poets, and the most original, and therefore, he was not properly understood and appreciated. A modern critic, Herbert Read in his essay *In Defence of Shelley* (1935) wrote: "Byron, who was a very honest critic, even of his friends, was the first to be aware of Shelley's *particular* quality. 'You know my high opinion of your own poetry', he wrote to Shelley, and added the reason: —'because it is of no school.' To Byron all the rest of contemporaries seemed 'second-hand' imitators of antique models or doctrinaire exponents of a mannerism. Shelley alone could not be so simply classified; his verse was too honestly original, too independently thought and wrought, to be accepted, as 'fashionable literature'. For there are always these two types of originality that responds like the Aolian harp to every 'gust of contemporary feeling' pleasing by its anticipation of what is but half-formed in the public consciousness; and originality that is not influenced by anything outside the poet's own consciousness, but is the

direct product of his individual mind and independent feeling. The latter type is always long in winning recognition and since Shelley's originality was essentially of this type, we need not be surprised that only a few of his contemporaries appreciated his poetry for its proper qualities.

"The whole tendency of Shelley is towards a clarification and abstraction of thought—away from the personal and particular towards the general and universal.

"But the highest beauties of Shelley's poetry are evanescent and imponderable—thought so tenuous and intuitive, that it has no visual equivalent; no positive impact.

"Such poetry has no precision, and the process of its unfolding is not logical. It does not answer to the general definition of any kind. It is vain to apply to it that method of criticism which assumes that the ardour of a verse can be analysed into separate vocables, and that poetry is a function of sound. Poetry is mainly a function of language—the exploitation of a medium, a vocal and mental material, in the interest of a personal mood of emotion, or of thoughts evoked by such moods or emotions. I do not think we can say much about it, according to our sensitivity we recognise its success. The rest of our reasoning about it is either mere prejudice, ethical anxiety, or academic pride."

Now let us examine the main characteristics of Shelley as a poet :—

1. Shelley as a Lyrical Poet. Shelley is considered the greatest lyrical poet of England. Though he wrote poems of various types, yet to most of his readers, Shelley will remain the perfect inventor of lyric harmonies. His practice of the lyric art agrees with his theoretic account in his *Defence of Poetry*. There he writes:—

"Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry'. The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconsistent wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic whether of its approach or departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the result; but when composition begins, inspiration

is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day, whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study."

The lyrics of Shelley which are born of inspiration, have the unpremeditated, effortless and spontaneous quality, as mentioned in the above passage. *Prometheus Unbound* was the first poem of Shelley which distinctly showed that one of the greatest lyric poets of the world had been born. It is full of most exquisite lyrics. Almost all the modes of song, from the simplest to the most intricate, are to be found in the earlier acts, while in the closing act of the drama which contains a number of great choric songs of the earth and moon, and the triumphant strains of the hours and the spirits mind, Shelley reaches the sublimest note of his lyric.

Shelley's lyrical strain is present in almost all his longer poems —*Hellas* (the two great choruses "Worlds on worlds are rolling over," and "The world's great age begins" anew), *Prince Athanase*, *The Witch of Atlas*, *Rosalind and Helen*, *Adonais*, *Alastor*, *Epipsychidion*, and *The Triumph of Life*—but it is in his smallest poems that his greatest virtue as a lyricist lies. These beautiful lyrics are: "To Constantia Singing", the "Ozymandias" sonnet, the "*Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*", the "Stanzas written in Dejection", the "Ode to the West Wind", the "Cloud", "Skylark", "Arethusa", the "World's Wanderers", "Music when soft voices die", "The flower that smiles to day", ' Rarely, rarely, comest th'on", the "Lament", "One world is too often profaned", the "Indian Air", the second "Lament," "O World! O life! O time!", the "Invitation", and the "Recollection." This long list which might have been made longer, contains, in the words of Saintsbury, "things absolutely consummate, absolutely unsurpassed, only by a few other things as perfect as themselves."

Referring to the qualities of these lyrics, Cowling writes in his book, *Shelley and other Essays*: "These short lyrics are either the fancies of the poet conceived 'about an image of the mind' like the wonderful "Witch of Atlas", "The Cloud", "Arethusa", or they are expression of moods, like *To Night*; or "O world ! O life ! O time !" or they are both combined, like "To a Skylark" and the "Ode to the West Wind". Their perfection lies in the absolute fusion of imagery and rhythm in a diction which is almost music. The soul which

utters them is the melancholy soul of Shelley, overshadowed by his tragic destiny; at one moment escaping from his misery into the beauties of the elements of air and water; at another, unable to escape, and compelled to express his sadness in song. Fortunately for his sanity, he could enter by imagination into the life and being of all ethereal things, and by so doing escape from that analysis of his own and others' minds, which works and errs amidst dangerous secrets and dark purposes."

The lyrics of Shelley not only voice the spirit of revolt of his time, but are also inspired by his love for humanity, love of freedom for all mankind, hatred of all oppression, and of prophecy of a golden age, and it is on account of these noble sentiments which have a universal appeal, that they will live for ever. Referring to this point Ernest Rys writes in his book, *Lyric Poetry* :

"We recognise the string of the new forces of the time that helped to quicken his lyric pulse to a finer heat. But this is not all; his poems will live, if they are still to outwit the centuries, as we think, because they not only hold in them the spirit of their own century, but hold too that larger spirit of poetry which he recognised in Homer and Dante, and which as he knew, endures by reason of its universal, and not of its special office. The lyric poet in his understanding was not for an age, but for all time."

2. **Shelley, the Rebel and the Reformer.** Shelley was above all a humanitarian. Love was the root and basis of his nature. As Symons has pointed out, "This love first developed as domestic affection, next as friendship, then as a youth's passion, and at last it began to shine with a steady lustre as an all-embracing devotion to his fellowmen. There was an intense and glowing passion of unselfishness, which throughout his life led Shelley to find his strongest interests in the joys and sorrows of his fellow creatures, which inflamed his imagination with visions of humanity made perfect, and which filled his days with sweet deeds of unnumbered charities."

Loving all mankind, and wishing every human being to live a happy and free life, Shelley was a great devotee of liberty, and he hated all types of oppression which hamper the free and proper growth of a man's personality, Shelley's humanitarianism, his love of liberty and hatred of all oppression turned him into a rebel against all those established institutions, political, religious and social, which meant to suppress mankind in any part of the world.

Shelley had made a lifelong habit of commemorating in verse all signs of democratic movements which came to his attention. Having heard in 1812 that a new republic was imminent in Mexico, he composed a lyrical tribute to its success, addressed "To the Republicans of North America." His "Feelings of a Republican on the fall of Bonaparte", published with *Alastor* in 1816, exulted over the defeat of one who had, according to Shelley, "danced for a number of years upon the grave of liberty". In 1820 he wrote two of his lofty odes in honour of liberty—*Ode to Naples* and *Ode to Liberty*. The *Ode to Liberty* which was elicited by the Spanish revolution is among the best of Shelley's political poems. Here he describes the evil state of the world before the birth of liberty, how liberty was born in Athens, and lived a while in Rome but deserted it, and was unknown for a thousand years until the time of Alfred and the rising of the cities in sacred Italy. The light it had shed was darkened by the armies of Napoleon. But now the Spaniards, by their magnificent example, exhorted sleeping England, a desolate Italy, and a king-deluded Germany to rekindle the lamps of liberty "within the dome of this dim world." In *Ode to Naples* Shelley chose the great proclamation of a constitutional government of Naples in 1820, and paid the tribute of his solemn music to the rebels against the league of tyrants. In 1822 he wrote *Hellas*, his last political poem, to celebrate the Greek war against the Turks "as a portion of the cause of civilisation and moral achievement." It was a part and parcel of Shelley's protracted efforts to glorify the spread of liberty across the continent from Spain towards the East, and salute what he hoped was a new race of liberty-conscious men, "nursed in the abhorrence of the opinions which are its chains."

Besides these poems which were written to commemorate the success of political revolts, the theme of a number of Shelley's great poems is rebellion against unjust institutions. In *The Revolt of Islam*, his purpose was, as he tells in the preface, "to kindle in the bosom of his readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice can ever wholly extinguish among mankind", to "illustrate the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind", and "to celebrate love as the sole law which govern the moral world." In *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley compares his Prometheus to Satan of *Paradise Lost*; but he deliberately makes his arch-rebel his hero, gives him all the virtues, and ends the poem with his triumph.

Prometheus, a rebel like Shelley himself, represents all that is good in suffering humanity; Jupiter represents the tyrannous and eternal evil by which humanity is oppressed. Jupiter is suddenly and mysteriously overthrown, and Prometheus is freed. At once the universe is cured of its disease, and all things rejoice in common.

In the field of religion Shelley disliked narrow-mindedness and exclusiveness; he disliked all kinds of formalism. He had the Greek hatred of all kinds of priestcraft. In *Queen Mab* he says of the temple of Jerusalem in a very angry language :

> There an inhuman and uncultured race
> Howled hideous praises to their Demon—God.

In *Prometheus Unbound* Jupiter symbolises all these religions of fear and terror which originally given power by the mind of man (Prometheus), now tyrannise over and torture it. The theme and situation of *The Cenci* also is the heroic resistance to tyranny.

But Shelley is not a rebel who takes pleasure in mere destruction ; he is a reformer also. The theme of all these poems is the contrast between the world as it is over against the world as it ought to be. He has a faith that the great gap between the two worlds can be closed. He believed that the reform of political institutions and the elimination of religious superstitions would effect the changes he desired. Accordingly in *Queen Mab* he preached the necessity of reform. Shelley's attempt to be a legislator of the world, and to make his poetry into what he called an "ardent intercessor" in the promotion of a new order was not conspicuously successful, but it is one of the numerous ironies in the reception of his political poetry that *Queen Mab* which he rejected in 1821 as more likely "to injure than to serve the cause of freedom", was to become in the early Victorian period an instrument to the radical reformers, and it was to earn the praise in 1880's, of such Fabian socialists as George Bernard Shaw.

3. **The Prophetic Note in Shelley.** In his poetry Shelley takes up the role of a prophet. He believes that regeneration follows destruction; that change does not mean extinction, and that there is yet hope for the world if it pay heed to those unacknowledged legislators of the world, the prophetic poets. This prophecy underlies most of Shelley's poems. For instance, the underlying hope of several of his well-known lyrics, and especially, *The West Wind*, *The Cloud* and *The Skylark*, is either that the melancholy world can be exchanged for some bright

world of the hereafter, or that the world as it is can be converted into a world as it ought to be.

Though in *Ode to the West Wind* Shelley voices the complaint, "I fall upon the thorns of life ! I bleed!"—and records his conviction that "heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed" one who was formerly, like the wind itself, tameless, swift and proud; yet the concluding petition of the poet is full of hope :

> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
> And by the incantation of this universe
> Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
> Ashes and sparks my words among mankind!
> Be through my lips to unawakened earth
> The trumpet of a prophecy ! O wind,
> If winter comes, can spring be far behind.

In *The Cloud* such statements as "I change but I cannot die', and "I silently laugh at my own cenotaph", could be accepted as evidences of Shelley's belief in some kind of immortality as well as his yearning towards a higher status. In *The Skylark*, the comparison of the bird to a poet hidden "in the light of thought" whose singing converts the world to "sympathy with hopes and fears it (formerly) heeded not", might be considered as evidences of Shelley's continued hopefulness about the possibility of the world's redemption through the power of human thought when it is given a memorable expression in poetry.

This prophetic note, the hope in a golden age, the regeneration of mankind, the millennium, underlie also the major poems of Shelley. In *Queen Mab*, Shelley supposes that in due time, there is in store for man, through the workings of natural law, a future age. Such is Queen Mab's parting admonition to Ianthe :—

> Yet, human spirit ! bravely hold thy course,
> Let virtue teach thee firmly to pursue
> The gradual paths of an aspiring change;
> For birth and life and death, and that strange state
> Before the naked soul has found its home,
> All tend to perfect happiness, and urge
> The restless wheels of being on their way.

In *The Revolt of Islam*, though the hero and the heroine, Laon and Cythna, are defeated in their mission, and no millennium is produced, Shelley has not surrendered his hopes for the future. He believes that centuries will pass before the goal is attained, and that attain-

ment is possible only through the efforts of wise, virtuous, and heroic human beings. Though Laon and Cythna will not live to see the earthly paradise, they will join that company of the immortals whom Cythna eloquently describes : the moral leaders or philosopher-kings of the past :

> The good and mighty of departed ages
> Are in their graves, the innocent and free,
> Heroes and poets, and prevailing sages,
> Who leave the vesture of their majesty,
> To adorn and clothe this naked world;—and we
> Are like to them—such perish, but they leave
> All hope, or love, or truth, or liberty,
> Whose forms their mighty spirits could conceive,
> To be a rule and law to ages that survive.

In *Prometheus Unbound*, in the last act, the Spirit of earth tells the assembled company of the miraculous effects of the sky born spell-music, and how "with little change of shape or hue" all things had put their evil natures off. And the Spirit of the Hour appears to report the successes of his last journey, and to describe finally the state of man under the new dispensation :

> The painted veil, by those who were, called life,
> Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,
> All men believed and hoped, is torn aside,
> The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
> Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
> Exempt from awe,worship, degree, the king
> Over himself; just, gentle, wise, but man
> Passionless—no, yet free from guilt or pain
> Which were, for his will made or suffered them
> Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
> From chance, and death and mutability,
> The clogs of that which else might overs oar
> The loftiest star of unascended heaven.

In *Hellas* the final emotional chorus is a song of victory heralding the golden age :

> The world's great age begins anew;
> The golden years return;
> The earth doth like a snake renew
> Her winter weeds outworn;
> Heaven smiles, and faiths and empire gleam
> Like wrecks of dissolving dream.

Shelley believes that there can be no victory so long as there are

throughout the world such bloodshed, ravage and bewilderment as he had been delineating :

> O, cease ! must hate and death return !
> Cease ! must men kill and die ?
> Cease ! drain not to its dregs the urn
> Of bitter prophecy.
> The world is weary of the past,
> O might it die or rest at last.

4. Shelley as the Poet of Nature. Shelley loved Nature intensely and found a deep kinship with her. In his early poems he shows the influence of Wordsworth and his attitude to Nature is rather vague and ill-defined. Shelley's poem on Mount Blank is a fine illustration of his early attitude to Nature. He called this poem an undisciplined overflowing of the soul ; and this is a just description of it. The ideas fade into each other so quickly that it is difficult for the reader to grasp them. The poet's imagination is still vague and wandering, and his purpose is not clear even to himself. He is under the influence of Wordsworth, especially in the opening passage, but he is not sure of his grounds:

> The everlasting universe of things
> Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
> Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
> Now lending splendour, wherefrom secret springs
> The source of human thoughts its tribute brings
> Of waters—with a sound but half its own,
> Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
> In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
> Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
> Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
> Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.

As Clutton-Brock points out, Shelley at this stage "was not yet the myth-maker he afterwards became, when clouds and the sun and wind and stars were living things to him, and he could write of them as other poets write of men and women. He was still inciting his imagination with metaphysics, and not quite sure whether the wonders of the earth and sky were interesting for their own sake or for what the human mind put into them."

But as time passed, Shelley, who at first tried to commune with Nature on equal terms, began to realise the importance of Nature. The emphasis shifted from himself to Nature. Thus *The Cloud*, written in the same year as *The Sensitive Plant* (in which he suggested that at least certain portions of Nature are dependent on human

cultivation), contains an opposite doctrine. For the cloud is independent of human contacts ; it has its transcendent serenities, and it holds some secret of everlasting life. Similarly the skylark seems to possess an insight and rapture denied to men. The death of Napoleon does not affect 'Mother Earth' at all. The same doctrine underlies Adonais. Keats may be dead, but Nature has the power of continuous revival. Viewed in the light of Eternity, stars are no more enduring than men, but viewed from the standpoint of men they suggest at least a relative immortality. Nature, therefore, is greater than man. She commands wider spaces and her vitality is less subject to decay. Radiant herself, she throws a glimmering light beyond the horizon of time.

Shelley has expressed his attitude to Nature in a number of lyrics. In these short poems his impassioned treatment of Nature varied according to the mood he was in. Sometimes he saw Nature as one and indivisible, as a spiritual being who through all her forms "spreads undivided, operates unspent". The Hymn to Asia—"Life of Life, thy lips enkindle"—is an example of this mood with Nature. In some lyrics Shelley looked upon Nature, not as one Being, but as many beings, in which every natural object or phenomenon has its own life, and acts and thinks and plays like a man or child. In such a mood Shelley sees Nature as the men of the mythical period saw her. Like a Greek he gives life to everything, and becomes almost as young as the earlier period, and makes new nature-myths like the young heathen. For example, in *The Sensitive Plant* he creates the myth of winter who like a giant tears the cataracts from the hill and hangs them to his girdle. In *Prometheus Unbound* there is the impersonation of the earth and of the moon. The image of the moon is nature-myth ; every touch is made out of the doings of nature. Within the chariot

> Sits a winged infant, white
> Its countenance like the whiteness of bright snow,
> Its plumes are as feathers of sunny frost,
> Its limbs gleam white, through the wind-flowing folds
> Of its white robe, woof of ethereal pearl.

Shelley also at times uses natural phenomenon as emblematic of mental states. For example, in *The West Wind*, *The Cloud* and *The Skylark* he seeks in the natural world for analogies by which to reassure himself that regeneration follows destruction, that change does not mean extinction, and that there is yet hope for the world,

if it will pay heed to those unacknowledged legislators, the prophetic poets.

In his description of natural phenomena Shelley is true to things as they are. In fact he sometimes describes them with an accuracy which we might call scientific. *The Cloud* seems to have been written by a meteorologist. In the following passage where Shelley describes the fate of a globe of dew, from dawn to sunset there is pure science in lovely verse :

As the dissolving warmth of dawn manyfold
A half unfrozen dew-globe, green and gold,
And crystalline, till it becomes a winged mist
And wanders up the vault of the blue day,
Outlives the moon, and on the sun's last ray
Hangs o'er the sea, a fleece of fire and amethyst.

KEATS

(1795—1821)

Of all the Romantic poets, **John Keats** was the pure poet. He was not only the last but the most perfect of the Romanticists. He was devoted to poetry and had no other interest. Unlike Wordsworth who was interested in reforming poetry and upholding the moral law ; unlike Shelley who advocated impossible reforms and prophesied about the golden age ; and unlike Byron who made his poetry a vehicle of his strongly egoistical nature and political discontents of the time; unlike Coleridge who was a metaphysician; and Scott who relished in story-telling, Keats did not take much notice of the social, political and literary turmoils, but devoted himself entirely to the worship of beauty, and writing poetry as it suited his temperament. He was, above all things, a poet, and nothing else. His nature was entirely and essentially poetical and the whole of his vital energy went into art.

Unlike Byron who was a lord, and Shelley who belonged to an aristocratic family, Keats came of a poor family, and at an early age he had to work as a doctor's assistant. But his medical studies did not stand in the way of his passion for writing poetry, which was roused by his reading of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which revealed to him the vast world of poetry. He also became interested in the beauty of nature. His first volume of poems appeared in 1817 and his first long poem *Endymion* in 1818, which opened with the following memorable lines :

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever ;
Its loveliness increases ; it will never
Pass into nothingness ; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us ; and sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and healthy, and quiet breathing.

This poem was severely criticised by contemporary critics, which must have shocked Keats. Besides this a number of other calamities engulfed him. He had lost his father when he was only nine ; his mother and brother died of tuberculosis, and he was himself suffering from this deadly disease. All these misfortunes were intensified by his disappointment in love for Fanny Brawne whom Keats loved passionately. But he remained undaunted, and under the shadow of death and in the midst of most excruciating suffering Keats brought out his last volume of poems in the year 1820 (which is called the 'Living Year' in his life). The *Poems* of 1820 are Keats's enduring monument. They include the three narratives, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *Lamia ;* the unfinished epic *Hyperion* ; the Odes, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, and a few sonnets.

In *Isabella* Keats made an attempt to turn a somewhat repellent and tragic love story of Isabella and Lorenzo who was murdered by Isabella's brothers, into a thing of beauty by means of fine narrative skill and beautiful phraseology. In *Lamia* Keats narrated the story of a beautiful enchantress, who turns from a serpent into a glorious woman and fills every human sense with delight, until as the result of the foolish philosophy of old Appolonius, she vanishes for ever from her lover's sight. *The Eve of St. Agnes*, which is the most perfect of Keats's medieval poems, is surprisingly beautiful in its descriptions. *Hyperion* which is a magnificent fragment deals with the overthrow of the Titans by the young sun-god Apollo. This poem shows the influence of Milton as Endymion of Spenser. *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, which captures the spirit of Middle Ages has a haunting melody. Though small, it is a most perfect work of art.

Of the odes, those *To a Nightingale*, *On a Grecian Urn* and *To Autumn* stand out above the rest and are among the masterpieces of poetic art. The Ode *On a Grecian Urn* which ends with the following most memorable lines in the whole of Keats's poetry :

'Beauty is Truth, and Truth Beauty',—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The *Ode to Autumn*, in which Keats has glorified Nature, is a poem which for richness and colour has never been surpassed.

Though Keats died young, when he had barely attained the age of twenty-five, and had only a few years in which he could effectively write poetry, his achievement in the field of poetry is so great, that we wonder what he might have accomplished if he had lived longer. For a long time his poetry was considered merely as sensuous having no depth of thought. But with the help of his letters critics have reinterpreted his poems, and now it has been discovered that they are based on mature thinking, and that there is a regular line of development in thought as well as art. He was not an escapist who tried to run away from the stark realities of life, but he faced life bravely, and came to the conclusion that sufferings play an important part in the development of human personality. As a worshipper of beauty, though his first approach was sensuous, his attitude suddenly became philosophical, and he discovered that there is beauty in everything, and that Beauty and Truth are one. As an artist he is supreme among English poets. As a poet he had very high ideals before him. He wanted to become the poet of the human heart, one with Shakespeare. For him the proper role of poetry is "to be a friend to soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of men", and the real poet is one "to whom the miseries of the world are misery, and will not let him rest".

Keats sincerely and persistently lived up to these high ideals. Taking into account all these factors and the very short span of life that was given to him by the Providence, it is no exaggeration to say that of all the English poets he comes nearest to Shakespeare.

Since the publication of Keats's early poems critics have agreed that his poetry has sensuousness and passion. They, however, have differed on this point whether there is any philosophical depth in them or not. The earlier critics regarded Keats as an immature poet, and so refused to take his poems seriously. But since the publication of his letters (about forty years after his death) the verdicts of the critics, on the whole, have been more favourable.

The worst attack on Keats on the publication of *Endymion* was made by Lockhart in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1818). There he wrote : "Our youthful poet passes into a long strain of foaming abuse against a certain class of English poets, whom, with Pope at their head, it is much the fashion with the ignorant unsettled pretenders of the present time to undervalue...fanciful dreaming tea-drinkers, who, without logic enough to analyse a single idea, or imagination enough to form one original image, or learning enough to distinguish bet-

ween the written language of Englishmen and the spoken jargon of cockneys (the lower classes of people living in London, to which Keats also belonged), presume to talk with contempt of some of the most exquisite spirits the world ever produced, merely because they did not happen to exert their faculties in laborious affected descriptions of flowers seen in window-pots, or cascades heard at Vauxhall; in short, because they chose to be wits, philosophers, patriots, and poets, rather than to found the Cockney school of versification, morality, and politics.

"Mr. Keats has adopted the loose, nerveless versifications and Cockney rhymes of the poet of Rimni (Leigh Hunt who also belonged to the poorer classes of London, and was a friend of Keats) ; but in fairness to that gentleman, we must add, that the defects of the system are tenfold more conspicuous in his disciple's work than in his own. Mr. Hunt is a small poet, but he is a clever man. Mr. Keats is a still smaller man, and he is a boy of petty abilities, which he has done everything in his power to spoil...

"We venture to make one small prophecy, that his bookseller will not second time venture £ 50 upon any thing he can write. It is better and a wiser thing to be a starved apothacry than a starved poet ; so back to the shop Mr. John, back to 'plasters, pills, and ointment boxes' etc. But, for Heaven's sake, young Sangrado, be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifices in your practice than you have been in your poetry."

Two years later the famous critic Jeffrey defended Keats in his *Review of Endymion and Lamia etc.* (1820). There he observed : "We had never happened to see either of these volumes till very lately—and have been exceedingly struck with the genius they display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagances. That imitation of our old writers, and especially of our older dramatists, has brought on, as it were, a second spring in our poetry ;—and few of its blossoms are either more profuse of sweetness, or richer in promise, than this which is now before us. Mr. Keats, we understand, is still a very young man ; and his whole works, indeed, bear evidence enough of fact. They are full of extravagance and irregularity, rash attempts at originality, interminable wanderings, and excessive obscurity. They manifestly require, therefore, all the indulgence that can be claimed for a first attempt. But we think it no less plain that they deserve it : for they are flushed all over with the rich lights of fancy ; and so coloured and bestrewn with the

flowers of poetry that even while perplexed and bewildered in their labyrinths, it is impossible to resist the intoxication of their sweetness, or to shut our hearts to the enchantments they so lavishly present. The models upon which he has formed himself, in the *Endymion*, the earliest and by much the most considerable of his poems, are obviously *The Faithful Shepherdess* of Fletcher, and *The Sad Shepherd* of Ben Jonson ;—the exquisite metres and inspired diction of which he has copied with great boldness and fidelity—and, like his great originals, has also contrived to impart to the whole piece that true rural and poetical air, which is at once homely and majestic, luxurious and rude, and sets before us the genuine sights and sounds and smells of the country, with all the magic and grace of Elysium....

"It is, in truth, at least as full of genius as of absurdity ; and he who does not find a great deal in it to admire and give delight, cannot in his heart find any great pleasure in some of the finest creations of Milton and Shakespeare. There are very many such persons, we verily believe, even among the reading and judicious part of the community—correct scholars, we have no doubt, many of them, and, it may be, very classical composers in prose and in verse—but utterly ignorant, in our view of the matter, of the true genius of English poetry, and incapable of estimating its appropriate and most exquisite beauties. With that spirit we have no hesitation in saying that Mr. Keats is deeply imbued—and of those beauties he has presented us with many striking examples. We are very much inclined indeed to add that we do not know any book which we would sooner employ as a test to ascertain whether any one had in him a native relish for poetry, and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm. It must, we fear, be admitted, that, besides the riot and extravagance of his fancy, the scope and substance of Mr. Keats's poetry is rather too dreamy and abstracted to excite the strongest interest, or to sustain the attention through a work of any great compass or extent. He deals too much with shadowy and incomprehensible things, and is too constantly rapt into an extra-mundane Elysium to command a lasting interest with ordinary mortals and must employ the agency of more varied and coarser emotions if he wishes to take rank with the enduring poets of this or of former generations.

"Mr. Keats has unquestionably a very beautiful imagination, a perfect ear for harmony, and a great familiarity with the finest

diction of English poetry ; but he must learn not to misuse or misapply the advantages; and neither to waste the good gifts of Nature and study on intractable themes, nor to luxuriate too recklessly on such as are more suitable."

After the death of Keats, Hazlitt wrote in *Select British Poets* (1824) : "Mr. Keats is dead. He gave the greatest promise of genius of any poet of his day. He displayed extreme tenderness, beauty, originality and delicacy of fancy ; all he wanted was manly strength and fortitude to reject the temptations of singularity in sentiment and expression. Some of his shorter and later pieces are, however, as free from faults as they are full of beauties."

In the Victorian period also the critics appreciated the natural magic of Keats's poetry, but pointed out the lack of substance in it. For example, Matthew Arnold wrote in his essay, *John Keats* (1880) : "So baffled and so sorely laden,—while laden, at the same time, with a mighty formative thought requiring health, and merry days, and favouring circumstances, for its adequate manifestation—what wonder if the achievement of Keats be partial and incomplete ?

"Nevertheless, let and hindered as he was, and with a short term and imperfect experience,—'young', as he himself says of himself, 'and writing at random, straining after particles of light in the midst of a great darkness, without knowing the bearing of any one assertion, of any one opinion'—notwithstanding all this, by virtue of his feeling for beauty and his perception of the vital connection of beauty and truth, Keats accomplished so much in poetry, that in one of the two great modes by which poetry interprets, in the faculty of naturalistic interpretation, in what we call natural magic, he ranks with Shakespeare...Keats exhibits in his poetic expression magic and 'indescribable *gusto* in the voice'. No one in English poetry, save Shakespeare, has in expression quite the fascinating felicity of Keats, his perfection of loveliness. 'I think', he said humbly, 'I shall be among the English poets after my death.' He is ; he is with Shakespeare.

"For the second great half of poetic interpretation, for that faculty of moral interpretation which is in Shakespeare, and is informed by him with the same power of beauty as his naturalistic interpretation, Keats was not ripe. For the architectonics of poetry, the faculty which presides at the evolution of works like *Lear*, he was not ripe. His *Endymion*, as he himself well saw, is a failure, and his *Hyperion*, fine things as it contains, is not a success. But in shorter

things, where the matured power of moral interpretation, and the high architectonics which go with complete poetic development, are not required, he is perfect."

A reaction in favour of Keats set in even during Victorian period. It was discovered by some critics that Keats was not only a sensuous poet with a beautiful expression, but also a deep thinker. For example, Masson wrote in *The Life and Poetry of Keats* (1860): "Neither sensuousness alone, nor sensuousness governed by a reflective and fanciful intellect, will constitute a great poet. However, highly endowed a youthful poet may be in these, his only chance of real greatness is in passing on, by due transition and gradation, to that more matured state of mind in which, though the sensuous may remain and the cool fancy may weave its tissue as before, human interest and sympathy with the human heart and grand human action shall predominate in all. Now, in the case of Keats, there is evidence of the fact of this gradation. There is evidence of a progress both intellectually and morally; of a disposition, already consciously known to himself, to move forward out of the sensuous or the merely sensuous-ideal mood, into the mood of the truly epic poet, the poet of life, sublimity and action. Thus, in one of his prose letters, he says, "Although I take poetry to be the chief, yet there is something else wanting to one who passes his life among books and thoughts of books.' And again, 'I find earlier days are gone by ; I find that I can have no enjoyment in the world but continual drinking of knowledge. I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good to the world. Some do it with their society ; some with their art ; some with their benevolence ; some with a sort of power of conferring pleasure and good humour on all they meet—and, in a thousand ways, all dutiful to the command of nature. There is but one way for me. The road lies through application, study and thought. I will pursue it. I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for philosophy—Were I calculated for the former, I should be glad ; but, as I am not, I shall turn all my soul to the latter.' In his poetry we have similar evidence. Even in his earlier poems one is struck not only by the steady presence of a keen and subtle intellect, but also by frequent flashes of permanently deep meaning, frequent lines of lyric thoughtfulness, and occasional maxims of weighty and historic generality. From *Endymion* itself, sensuous to very wildness as the poem is considered, scores of passages might be quoted to prove that already, while it was being written, intellect, feeling, and experience were doing their work with Keats—that, to

use his own figure, he had then already advanced for some time out of the Infant Chamber, or Chamber of mere Sensation, into the Chamber of Maiden Thought, and had even there begun to distinguish the openings of the dark passages beyond and around, and to be seized with the longing to explore them. Seeing this, looking then at such of his later poems as *Lamia* and *The Eve of St. Agnes,* and contemplating last of all that wonderful fragment of *Hyperion* which he hurled into the world as he was leaving it, and of which Byron but expressed the common opinion when he said, 'It seems actually inspired by the Titans, and is as sublime as Aeschylus', we can hardly be wrong in believing that, had Keats lived to the ordinary age of man, he would have been one of the greatest of all our poets. As it is, though he died at the age of twenty-five, and left only what in all does not amount to much more than a day's leisurely reading, I believe we shall be disposed to place him very near indeed to our very best."

In the twentieth century, the critic who has firmly established the reputation of Keats as a truly great poet on the basis of profundity of thought, is Middleton Murray. In his *Studies in Keats* (1930) he wrote :

"The relation between Beauty and Truth was one which exercised the mind and heart of Keats throughout his life. This was the chief form into which his search for a purpose in life was cast. The words occur constantly, and always significantly, in his Letters. They are the the core of his famous definition : 'The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship to Beauty and Truth'.

"The bearing of this statement on the last stanza of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, and upon the whole poem, is immediate. The statement was made long before the Ode was written, while Keats was still comparatively a happy man. In the ensuing time the 'disagreeables' which art had to 'evaporate' had come to deserve a harsher name. He had been 'convinced on his nerves that the world is full of heart-break, misery, pain and oppression.' The evaporating of disagreeables has passed into the lifting of the burden of misery. The tone is deeper, as the experience is more profound. Nevertheless, the words are, continually in Keats, perfectly prophetic of the last stanza of *The Grecian Urn.*

"The Urn is such a work of art ; it is capable of making 'all disagreeables' evaporate from their being in close relationship to

'Beauty and Truth'. The thought came to Keats as he was meditating on the effect of a painting; it was exemplified, he said, throughout *King Lear*—a dramatic poem. And the Grecian Urn, as it is depicted in Keats's Ode, is something between a painting and a dramatic poem. It is a sculptured drama. And this is as important to remember is it is readily forgotten. The Grecian Urn of Keats's poem was not some hypothetical actual vase, but the Urn of his imagination. To know what it was, we are not to conceive some hypothetical original but simply to read his poem.

"No doubt, at some or other time, Keats had actually seen and delighted in the beauty of a Greek vase. But that they may have been long before he wrote his poem. It was probably long before. The vision lay somewhere in the deeps of his being, to appear at moments before his conscious imagination. In the Third Book of *Endymion* (II. 29-32) we read:

> Aye, 'bove withering of old-lipped Fate
> A thousand Powers keep religious state,
> In water, fiery realm, and airy bourne;
> And, *silent as a consecrated urn*,
> Hold sphery session for a season due.

It appeared more visibly, a year before he actually wrote *The Grecian Urn*, in a letter to Reynolds, where he complained of the ugly visions which haunted him when he lay sleepless. Perhaps, he said, some were more fortunate than himself, escaped these evil visitations. What these fortunate ones would see, in their happier vision, would be:

> Some Titian colours touch'd into real life,—
> The sacrifice goes on; the pontiff knife
> Gleams in the sun, the milk-white heifer lows,
> The pipe goes shrilly; the libation flows:
> A white sail shows above the green-head cliff;
> The marines join hymn with those on land.

There is the frieze of another Grecian Urn—manifestly no real one, in the practical and tangible sense, but as beautiful and of the same kind as the vase of the *Ode*. The Greek vase was a form into which Keats's sensuous imagination could naturally be cast.

"Later, and near to the time of writing the Ode, the vision came again—On the morning when he said, 'the fibres of the brain were relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and such a happy degree that pleasure had no show of enticement nor pain no unbear-

able power.' 'Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love', he wrote, 'have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me ; they seem rather like figures on a Greek Vase—a man and two women whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguisement.' The vision formed the whole theme of the *Ode on Indolence.* The Greek vase, with its surrounding frieze, was a form congenial to Keats's richly plastic imagination ; it was a means by which he could immobilise, in 'a frozen moment', the beauty of an imagined action.

"The Grecian Urn may have been in part actual, or wholly on imaginative creation ; that is indifferent. The important thing is the action depicted upon it—the drama, the thing doing, in the actual sense of the Greek word. That is evident enough to any one who simply reads the poem ; the vase is primarily a sculptured frieze, an arrested action, of the same kind as the Parthenon pediment.

"It is on this arrested action that Keats's imagination intensely plays. He envies the felicity of the participants who are immune from mortality and decay. But they are human still. Mortality and decay have slipped from them, like a garment ; but that is all. They are mortals as we are ; we have wandered unawares into an enchanted land, where they can never return. Their felicity has its tinge of sorrow ; the poet who began by envying, ends almost by pitying. They are, as it were, lost to humanity.

> And, little town, thy streets evermore
> Will silent be ; and not a soul to tell
> Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

The happening is utterly human. It is to misconceive the poem completely, to conceive as it a theorizing on an exquisite piece of decorative art. It is a drama of the pure imagination. A destiny falls upon some human beings ; they pass into the spell-bound land of eternity,

> All breathing human passion far above

and the poet who watches them, who indeed himself has cast the spell of eternal immobility upon them, envies and grieves for them. The Urn is the record of the lovely and yet fatal enchantment.

"More exactly, the Grecian Urn is the symbol of a possibility of vision. All human action, all human experience, can be thus arrested in enchantment. All the visible and invisible drama of human life can be thus seen, or imagined, under the aspect of eternity. That is why the 'silent form doth tease us out of thought as

doth eternity'. It is not that it is incomprehensible as the abstract aspect of eternity; but that it is terribly simple and lucid as is the eternal aspect of things of which it is a symbol. This aspect of things is beyond thought, because it is prior to thought; and beyond thought because it the end of thinking. Under this aspect the innocent vision of the child doubtless beholds existence; the grown man can recapture it only when he has struggled onwards towards a second innocence. And then he is unable to declare what it is that he sees; it is too simple for speech. What words can there be to describe this seeing of the world and ourselves with a vision from which all passion has been dissolved away; with a vision which is unclouded by any desire or any regret; by any belief or any anxiety : this moment of untroubled lucidity in which we are unmoved spectators of the great drama of human destiny."

F.R. Levis, another great modern critic, however, acknowledges the greatness of Keats mainly on the basis of aesthetic excellence and not on maturity and depth of thought as emphasised by Middleton Murray. In his book *Revaluation* (1936) he writes : "If, then, in Keats's development from *Endymion* to the Ode *To Autumn* we see, as we may (leaving aside for a moment the *Hyperion*), the promise of greatness, it does not lie in any effective presence of the kind of seriousness aspired to in *Sleep and Poetry* :

> And can I bid these joys farewell ?
> Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
> Where I may find the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts.

It lies rather in the marvellous vitality of the art that celebrates 'these joys'—in the perfection attained within a limiting aestheticism. Remarkable intelligence and character are implied in that attainment, especially when we consider the starting-point and the surrounding influences : the beginnings in 'pleasant smotherings', with, as the incitement towards discipline, such poetic models as are represented by Leigh Hunt and the Cockney taste (at the highest level :

> Spenserian vowels that elope with ease
> And float along like birds o'er summer seas)."

Now let us examine the main characteristics of Keats as a poet :—

1. Keats's Sensuousness. The most obvious characteristic of Keats's poetry is its abundant sensuousness. It has been pointed out

by Garrod, "Not in political thinking, nor in tears given to human suffering, but in something which, though it seems easier, is in fact, far harder, lies Keats's real effectiveness; in the exercise, I mean, of the five senses. Matthew Arnold writes in *Essays in Criticism* : "Poetry, according to Milton's famous saying, should be 'simple, sensuous, and impassioned.' No one can question the eminence, in Keats's poetry, of the quality of sensuousness. Keats as a poet is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous ; the question with some people will be, whether he is anything else. Many things may be brought forward which seem to show him as under the fascination and sole dominion of sense, and desiring nothing better. There is the exclamation in one of his letters : 'O for a life of sensation rather than of thoughts !' There is the thesis in another 'that with a great Poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all other consideration'. "

An all-embracing sensuousness is the determining element of the distinctive individuality of Keats's genius. It is easy to cite from his works numerous passages conspicuous for their sensuous appeal. In the sonnet 'Bright Star' he writes :

> Not yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
> Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,
> To feel for ever its soft fall and smell;
> Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
> Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
> And so live ever...or else swoon to death.

In *Ode to Psychy*, the description of the love-making of Cupid and Psychy is highly sensuous :—

> 'Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,
> Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,
> They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass,
> Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
> Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,
> As of disjoined by soft-handed slumber,
> And ready still past kisses to outnumber
> At the tender eye-dawn of aurorean love :

Keats's sensuousness is not confined merely to the theme of love, nor is it of a light and sportive nature. It is serious, comprehensive and full-blooded. Some of his finest little poems embody the feelings of fatigue, and dullness. Thus in the well-known *Ode to a Nightingale* :

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains,
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk.

Keats wants to intensify this mental drowsiness by drinking wine of the finest type :

O for a draught of vintage that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth.
O for a beaker full of the warm south,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth,
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.

In his descriptions of natural scenes, Keats is more interested in the physical aspects of Nature, which appeal to the senses rather than to the intellect. In one of his early poems, *Sleep and Poetry*, he writes :

First the realm I'll pass
Of Flora, and old Pan : sleep in the grass,
Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;
Catch the white-headed nymphs in shady places,
To woo sweet kisses from averted faces,—
Play with their fingers, touch their shoulders white
Into a pretty sprinkling with a bite
As hard as lips can make it.

But Keats's sensuousness is always accompanied by his sentimental reaction. Referring to them W.M. Rossetti has rightly observed : "Sensuousness has been frequently defined as the paramount bias of Keats's poetic genius. This is, in large measure, unassailably true. He was a man of perception rather than of contemplation or speculation. Perception has to do with perceptible things: perceptible things must be objects of sense, and the mind which dwells on objects of sense must *ipso facto* be a mind of the sensuous order. But the mind which is mainly sensuous by direct action may also work by reflex action, and pass from sensuousness into sentiment. It cannot fairly be denied that Keats's mind continually did this; it had direct action potently, and reflex action amply. He saw so far and so keenly into the sensuous as to be penetrated with the sentiment

which, to a healthy and large nature, is its inseparable outcome. We might say that, if the sensuous was his atmosphere, the breathing apparatus with which he respired it was sentiment. In his best work—for instance, in all the great odes—the two things are so intimately combined that the reader can only savour the sensuous nucleus through the sentiment, its medium or vehicle. One of the most compendious and elegant phrases in which the genius of Keats has been defined is that of Leigh Hunt: 'He never beheld an oak tree without seeing the Dryad.' In immediate meaning Hunt glances at the mythical sympathy or personifying imagination of the poet; but, if we accept the phrase as applying to the sensuous object-painting, along with its ideal aroma or suggestion in his finest work, we shall find it full of right significance. We need not dwell upon other less mature performances in which the two things are less closely interfused. Certainly some of his work is merely and some even crudely, sensuous: but in this work the poet was trying his material and his powers, and rising towards mastery of his real faculty and ultimate function."

Keats as the Poet of Nature. Keats's treatment of Nature is intrinsically different from that of his contemporaries. He loved and interpreted her more for her own sake, and less for the sake of sympathy which the human mind can read into her with its own workings and aspirations. He had grown up neither like Wordsworth under the spell of lake and mountain, nor in the glow of the dreams of the Golden Age like Shelley, but was born and bred in London, where he did not get an opportunity of close contact with Nature. But it seems, as if by some mysterious birthright, he was gifted with an insight into all the beauties, and sympathy with all the life of the woods and fields. The surprise of a town-bred child in its first field full of wild flowers, and the rapture of a lover gazing on the face of a beloved may be said to represent, in combination, Keats's attitude towards Nature.

The faculty of the human mind which spreads itself on external objects, and gives life and personality to the objects observed, is less strong in Keats than in Wordsworth and Shelley. But he surpasses them both in the acuteness of his special sense. To illustrate from his maturer poems, consider the verse from *Ode to a Nightingale*:

> I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
> Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs;
> But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
> Wherewith the seasonable month endows

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild,
With hawthorn and the pastoral eglantine,
Fast-fading violet covered up in leaves,
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine
The numerous haunts of flies on summer eves.

The visible world for Keats meant chiefly the world of nature; not nature with all the mystical and moral overtones that Wordsworth found in it, but simply unanalysed delightfulness of living and growing things. It is the delicacy of the perception that strikes us first. There are many examples of it in *I stood tip-toe upon a little hill*, the first poem in the first volume:

...the sweet buds which with a modest pride
Pull droopingly, in slanting cover aside,
Their scantily-leaved and finely tapering stems,
Here are sweet peas, on tip-toe for a flight
With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white,

And taper fingers catching at all things,
To bind them all with tiny rings.
Where swarms of minnows show their little heads,
Staying their wavy bodies, 'gainst the stream.

Tracing the development of Keats as the poet of Nature, Stopford Brooke has observed in *Studies in Poetry*: "In the early poems it was a temper in Keats, of unruffled pleasure, a sensitive, girl like, sensuous pleasure in beauty, and in the consolation of beauty to the soul; a pleasure which loved also to have the body comfortable while the soul enjoyed, so that all things might be in harmony. It was also a temper in which, freed from the religious and philosophic troubles of man, he could play with nature. He had a way of fluttering, butterfly fashion, from one object to another, touching for the moment the momentary charm of each thing—the work of fancy who 'is never at home'. There is a passage in one of his earliest poems where he lingers on the bridge above a stream, and with a quick glancing eyes of a fawn above a stream, that waits for a nymph in lazy pleasure, notices minutely all things, or rather, lets all things flit in and out of his brain ; not caring to ask and to stay and to keep him company, but pleased with them and his game of life—enjoyment without thought, or thought its own enjoyment...

"When he had finished with *Endymion*, when the troubles of the world had come upon him, when he had seen his brother die, and felt himself tha1 life was ill-made for him, his note towards nature

changes. It is mixed with sorrow, but it is sorrow which is impassioned to lose itself in joy, which remembers the time of self-forgetfulness, and urges him to escape. 'Leave him behind,' cries sorrow, 'escape for your life into joy'. And Keats obeys; flies to nature and her loveliness, and for a time succeeds in forgetting; then the note of pain falls again, and again he forgets it, and again remembers, and again forgets,—till the alternating passion is worn out and all the mixed music dies.

"This is the spirit which informs the *Ode to a Nightingale.* The new sensibility to love and pain deepens the colour, strengthens the thought and passion of his nature poetry. It has entered into the flitting delight in beauty, and makes the description of nature more close, more sensitive, more imaginative, heard and seen than anything written in the earlier poems. Take the last two verses of the poem:—

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird !
No hungry generations tread thee down ;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown :
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien carn ;
The some that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn ! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self !
Adieu ! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do ; deceiving elf !
Adieu ! adieu ! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side ; and now, 'tis buried deep
In the next valley glades.
Was it a vision, or a waking dream ?
Fled is that music—do I wake or sleep.

"How different it is! This is no butterfly work, flying from one thing to another, always testing, never resting. Keats and nightingale are one; it is his soul that sings in the bird his music that passes over the hill. Into nature has now penetrated the tragedy of man. Yet it was not for long. The passion was deep while it lasted, but it seemed to him unworthy of the manifoldness of beauty to linger on it. There was so great an infinity in the beauty of the world that to mingle up in its pursuit the delaying pressure of the

sorrow of humanity was not right for him. He was bound to leave behind him this phase in which humanity was added to nature, for new loveliness unstained by human pain. In one of his letters Keats writes:—

> 'I look not for happiness if it is not in the present hour. Nothing startles me beyond the moment. The setting sun will always set me to nights, or if a sparrow were before my window, I take part in its existence, and pick about the gravel. The first thing that strikes me on hearing a misfortune is this...well, it cannot be helped, he will have the pleasure of trying the resources of his spirit.'

"This life in the moment, and in the momentary joy and movement of all things in nature, was the source of his directness of description. He was wholly in the place, and in the time, and with the things of which he wrote: not confused by the thought of how the trees would lock in winter if he saw them in spring, and how the clouds in the sky might be arranged to-morrow; still less confused by an imputation of his feelings to nature. In earlier days he did use what Ruskin calls the pathetic fallacy, but not now. What was enough, nay more than he wanted, and it is our want of imagination, of copiousness of heart, of clear sight and fulness of life, that sends us into the past, or into the future or into our own soul, when we are in the midst of any present beauty. I think it is due to this unconfusion of impression that Keats's imagination has room and capacity to make those fine impersonations of nature which since Spenser have never been so well done. In truth they are finer than those of Spenser. If he had been worried as Coleridge was with considering his past, if he had been tormented like Byron with his own unpleasant present, if he had a philosophic theory of nature like Wordsworth or Shelley to steal in and out of his imagination, he could never have realised so well the very life of autumn, the every day wanderings and fancies of the third spirit of the year.

> Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store.
> Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
> Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
> Thy hair soft-lifting by the winnowing wind ;
> Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
> Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
> Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers :
> And sometimes like a gleaner, thou dost keep
> Steady thy laden head across a brook,

> Or by a cyder-press, with patient look
> Thou watchest the last oozings, hour by hour.

"Where are the songs of Spring ?' he fancies that someone asks. 'Ay, where are they ?' Keats answers in half-sarcastic fashion. Why talk now of spring ? We are in autumn :

> Think not of them, thou hast thy music too

and he flies into a vivid description of the soul of the season. This joy in the present, absorption in the beauty of the hour, this making of it a divine possession, and losing in its loveliness the pain of life is one of the chief marks of his genius."

3. **Keats as an Artist.** Keats was a very painstaking artist. Unlike the other romantic poets as Shelley and Byron, he chiselled each word and line before he finally used it in his poems. For this reason some critics call him a classic in his art of writing poetry. He used words and phrases which served his own purpose, and in his work he was not guided by the poetic diction prevailing in his time. He looked upon poetry as an art and he was very particular of the material he was using. In this connection Prof. Grierson has pointed out : "It is this approach to poetry as an art rather than a vehicle of prophecy that accounts for the marked distinction of Keats and that of either Wordsworth or Shelley. Keats quite consciously uses language as Spenser and the Elizabethans and Milton used it, as one who is free of it, not confined to the language of the age, but at liberty to revive old words that have taken one's fancy. A glance at the glossary to Professor De Selincourt's admirable edition will show to what extent he robbed the other poets of their sweets—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Chapman, Browne, even Thompson. He is like these, one of the shapers of poetic diction. But in the quest for a diction to his taste he is guided by the colour, the atmosphere which he wishes to give to the poem as a whole, his narrative of mythical ages or past history."

Keats as an artist is particularly happy in the use of imaginative phrases, imagery and colour.

(*a*) **Keats's Phraseology.** Keats's poetry is full of phrases which simply haunt the imagination by virtue of their aptness and their musical quality. For example, in *Ode to a Nightingale*, he calls the nightingale 'light-winged Dryd of the trees,' who sings of summer in 'full-throated ease'. Other very apt and enchanting phrases which occur in that poem are : 'beaded bubbles winking at the brim' ; 'purple-stained mouth', 'the weariness, the fever, and the fret',

'leaden-eyed despairs'; 'embalmed darkness'. In *Ode on a Grecian Urn,* he uses such beautiful phrases as: 'still unravished bride of quietness', 'foster-child of silence and slow time', 'Sylvan historian', 'leaf-fringed legend', and so forth. In the sonnet 'Bright Star', he speaks of a solitary star sparkling in the sky, as 'nature's patient sleepless Eeremite'.

(*b*) **Pictorial Quality in Keats's Poetry.** Keats is a past master in giving word-pictures. Robert Bridges in his *Essays on Keats* has observed : "Closely allied to these imaginative phrases, and perhaps most characteristic of Keats and peculiar to him, are the short, vivid pictures which may be called his masterpieces in word-painting, in which with a few words he contrives completely to finish which is often of vast size." The last four lines of the *Chapman Homer* are a fine example of this quality of Keats's poetry :—

> Or like a stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
> He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

In *Ode on Melancholy,* Keats gives a life-like image in order to express the idea of earthly joy which is essentially transitory:

> Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding adieu.

He expresses the supreme power of poetry by the following most exquisite image :

> 'Tis might half-slumbering on its own right arm.

He portrays autumn as a person

> Sitting careless on a granary-floor,
> Her hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind ;
> Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
> Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while her hook
> Spares its next swath and all its twined flowers.

The best illustrations of Keats's pictorial quality are to be found in *The Eve of St. Agnes.* Here the first stanza gives us a chilly picture of the coldness of January weather :

> St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was !
> The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold ;
> The hair limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
> And silent was the flock in wooly fold :
> Numb were the beadman's fingers while he told

His rosary, and white his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from censer old,
Seems taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

(*c*) **Keats's Use of Colour.** Keats not only recovered in English poetry the almost forgotten splendour of colour ; he used it as a master craftsman. In *The Eve of St. Agnes,* when Old Angela takes Porphero to 'a little moonlight room', there is a note of strong colour :

Sudden a thought came like a *full blown rose*
Flushing his brow, and in his panted heart
Made *purple* riot.

The colour comes fully but more delicately with Madeline then Porphero's 'full blown rose' :

Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose be shut, and be a bud again.

When the lovers embrace, Keats describes the scene in a colourful manner :

Beyond the impassioned man impassion'd far
At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
Ethereal *flush'd,* heaven's deep repose ;
Into her dream he melted, as the *rose*
Blendeth its odour with *violet.*

4. **Keats as the Poet of Beauty.** Among all the English poets Keats is the greatest lover of beauty. His sensitive imagination thrilled to every touch of beauty from whatever quarter it came. His friend, Haydon, tells us that "the humming of bee, the sight of a flower, the glitter of the sun, seemed to make his nature tremble ; then his eyes flashed, his cheeks glowed, and his mouth quivered". He was as sensitive to the beauty of art and literature as to that of life and nature. He "looked upon the fine phrases like a lover," and when he first read Chapman's Homer he felt

Like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken ;
Or like a stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent upon a peak in Darien.

Keats did not care for history, or for politics, or for religion. The moving principle of his life was worship of beauty. He declared :

"With a great poet, the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration." His first pursuit of beauty, which is the soul of all his poetry, is embodied in his first long poem *Endymion*. The introduction to the poem proclaims his revolt from the world of commonplace in which he lives, and he resolves to find beauty in the loveliness of pure Nature ; in the great tragic stories of the world, when the world was great ; in all the fair and chivalrous tales of love and glory :

> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever :
> Its loveliness increases : it will never
> Pass into nothingness ; but still will keep
> A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
> Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

At this stage Keats worshipped Beauty not in this or that particular form. He loved it in the flower and the cloud. But "the yearning passion for the Beautiful", which was with Keats the master passion, is not a passion of the sensuous or sentimental poet. It is an intellectual passion. Thus he declared in his letter to his brother George : "The mighty abstract Idea of Beauty in all things...Then I should be most enviable—with the yearning passion I have for the beautiful, connected and made one with the ambition of the intellect." And in his last days Keats wrote : "If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory ; *but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things*, and if I had time I would have made myself remembered."

In his earlier poem, *Sleep and Poetry*, the 'vast idea' had involved the poet's passing beyond the realm of 'Flora and old Pan,' that is, away from the realm of beautiful things. He had asked :

> And can I ever bid these joys farewell ?

And he had answered :

> Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life
> Where I may find the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts.

He has thus, in that prophetic poem, seen beyond the principle of beauty to the principle of beauty in all things. But in *Endymion*, for all his efforts, he had remained almost wholly within the realm of 'Flora and old Pan'. It was because 'the agonies, the strife of human hearts' had not touched him directly. Tracing the development of Keats's conception of Beauty, Middleton Murray writes :

"Keats knew that he had to triumph over pain, but the pain had not yet come, and he was not one to invoke it intellectually. A merely intellectual reality was no reality to him at all; even a 'proverb was no proverb to him until his life had illustrated it'. And so in April 1818, when he is writing to Reynold with *Endymion* in his mind, regarding the preface to *Endymion*, it is simply 'the principle of beauty' of which he speaks. He has just been putting his loyalty to the proof again by writing *Isabella*, which is pre-eminently a romantic tale in the sense of being devoid of all substance of actual life and experience.

"At this very moment, when he was proclaiming the principle of beauty thus absolutely, pain had approached him: he was condemned to watch his brother die. He knew that in actual life he was to be called upon to bid a long farewell to the principle of beauty. It was then that he was convinced upon his nerves of the pain and misery and heartbreaks in the world, and confessed his despair of attaining to the love of good and ill. It was then that he told Taylor that he had been hovering for some time between 'an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for philosophy'. The exquisite sense of the luxurious is the homage to the principle of beauty; philosophy is to Keats the apprehension of the principle of beauty in *all* things. Now he is caught midway between the two: he has lost his hold of the one, he has not laid hold of the other. This is the condition he describes in the *Epistle to Reynolds*:

> Or is it that imagination brought
> Beyond its proper bound, yet still confin'd,
> Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,
> Cannot refer to any standard law
> Of either earth or heaven; it is a flaw
> In happiness to see beyond our bourn.

"This 'purgatory blind' is the condition which lies between allegiance to the principle of beauty and discovery of the principle of beauty in all things. The year 1818 had been a year of such a purgatory. After *Isabella* Keats wrote nothing until he began *Hyperion*, and in that poem the principle of beauty changes to the principle of beauty in all things. It is, as he tells his brother George, still a mighty, *abstract* idea; he speaks, as ever truly, for in *Hyperion* the 'vast idea' is abstract; but it is there—and the remainder of Keats's life was to be burned away in the process of its becoming concrete in and through him.

" 'Beauty in all things.' This was Keats's great poetic intuition

and the revelation of this beauty the great human purpose to which he dedicated himself and for which he was prepared to die. It sounds simple ; it is tremendous. It involves a profound acceptance of life as it is, a passing beyond all rebellion, not into the apathy of stoic resignation, but into a condition of soul to which the sum of things—'foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor'—is revealed as necessary and true and beautiful : and for the creative genius of the poet it means not only to have this vision, not only to have attained high reason, and the 'love of good and ill,' but to have the purpose and power to reveal to men that good and ill are to be loved ; not only the faculty to see that the sum of things is supremely beautiful but the faculty to show to other men that it is supremely beautiful."

In the course of the development of his mind Keats began more and more to realise that beauty and truth are very much akin to each other. In his letter to Baily he declared : 'I am certain of nothing, but of the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as beauty must be truth.' 'I am more zealous in this affair' he went on, 'because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning.'

Keats wrote his great Odes when his inward victory was accomplished. In this connection Middleton Murray remarks : "In part the *Ode to the Nightingale* is a very triumph-song to Death ; in part it is a song of despair ; as the song of the bird is in part an invitation to the supreme ecstasy of Death, in part the voice of immortality sounding clear amid the agony of mortality. These two movements of the divided soul are now blended into one strange and unearthly harmony ; it is as though the deep division of the soul had been reconciled, with no joy diminished and no pain denied. All that Keats had felt and thought is there, with all its contradictions ; but now the contradictions are made one.

"This acceptance—this 'love of good and ill'—is manifest in all Keats's poetry in this period of sudden opulence. As it is in the *Ode to a Nightingale*, so it is in the *Ode to Melancholy*.

She dwells with beauty—Beauty that must die
And joy whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu ; and aching pleasure nigh
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has sovran shrine,

> Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
> Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine ;
> His soul shall taste the sadness of her might
> And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

"Only those who have no sense for the true speech of poetry will call that a poem of despair ; it is a poem of triumph through despair. And the same acceptance, the same triumph through despair, is in the *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, of which the final words are often and pitifully misunderstood as the utterance of a sort of aestheticism :

> Thou shalt remain, in the midst of other woe
> Than ours, a friend to man, whom, thou say'st
> 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty,'—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

"These lines contain deep wisdom purchased at the full price of deep suffering. The *Ode to a Grecian Urn* is not a dream of unattainable beauty nor is the urn itself the sign of an impossible bliss beyond mortality. It has a precious message to mankind, not as a thing of beauty which gives an exquisite delight to the senses, but as a symbol and prophecy of a comprehension of human life to which mankind can attain."

From the very beginning of his poetic career, Keats never let go his clear conception that beauty such as he conceived it—the abstract idea of beauty in all things—is the summit and crown of a poet's aim. But he now identified beauty with truth, and out of them when together and at once, proceeded power. All things must bow to the highest beauty. When it was seen ; truth was seen and power came. That was his last thought ; that is the law of the whole universe. And splendidly he expressed it in *Hyperion* :

> for it is eternal law
> That first in beauty should be first in might.

That was the last thought of Keats on this matter—truth, beauty, and power—a co-equal trinity.'

CHAPTER IX

EARLY VICTORIAN POETS

The Victorian Age in English literature began in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and ended by 1900. Though strictly speaking, the Victorian age ought to correspond with the reign of Queen Victoria, which extended from 1837 to 1901, yet literary movements rarely coincide with the exact year of royal accession or death. From the year 1798 with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* till the year 1820 there was the heyday of Romanticism in England, but after that year there was a sudden decline. Wordsworth who after his early effusion of revolutionary principles had relapsed into conservatism and positive opposition to social and political reforms produced nothing of importance after the publication of his *White Doe of Rylstone* in 1815, though he lived till 1850. Coleridge wrote no poem of merit after 1817. Scott was still writing after 1820, but his work lacked the fire and originality of his early years. The Romantic poets of the younger generation unfortunately all died young—Keats in 1820, Shelley in 1822, and Byron in 1824.

Though the Romantic Age in the real sense of the term ended in 1820, the Victorian Age started from 1832 with the passing of the first Reform Act, 1832. The years 1820-1832 were the years of suspended animation in politics. It was a fact that England was fast turning from an agricultural into a manufacturing country, but it was only after the reform of the Constitution which gave right of vote to the new manufacturing centres, and gave power to the middle classes, that the way was opened for new experiments in constructive politics.

The Victorian Age is so long that for the sake of convenience it is often divided into two periods—**Early Victorian Period** and **Later Victorian Period.** The earlier period extended from 1832 to 1870.

The most important poets during the early Victorian period were Tennyson and Browning with Arnold occupying a somewhat lower position. After the passing away of Keats, Shelley and Byron in the

early eighteen twenties, for about fifteen years the fine frenzy of the high romantics subsided and a quieter mood ensued. With the abatement of the revolutionary fervour, Wordsworth's inspiration had deserted him and all that he wrote in the later years was dull and insipid. There appeared a host of poets of moderate talent like **John Clare, Thomas Love Peacock, Walter Savage Landor** and **Thomas Hood.** The result was that from 1820 till the publication of Tennyson's first important work in 1833 English poetry had fallen into the hands of the mediocrities. It was in fact by the publication of his two volumes in 1842 that Tennyson's position was assured as, in Wordsworth's language, "decidedly the greatest of our living poets." Browning's recognition by the public came about the same time, with the appearance of *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), although *Paracelsus* and *Sordello* had already been published. The early Victorian poetry which started in 1833, therefore, came to its own in the year 1842.

The early poetry of both Tennyson and Browning was imbued with the spirit of Romanticism, but it was romanticism with a difference. Tennyson recognised an affinity with Byron and Keats; Browning with Shelley, but their romanticism no longer implied an attitude of revolt against conventional models. It had itself become a convention The revolutionary fervour which inspired the poetry of the great Romantic poets had given place to an evolutionary conception of progress propagated by the writings of Darwin, Bentham and their followers. Though the writers of the new age still persisted in deriving inspiration from the past ages, yet under the spell of the marvels of science, they looked forward rather than backward. The dominant note of early Victorian period was, therefore, contained in Browning's memorable lines: "The best is yet to be". Tennyson found spiritual consolation in contemplating the

> One far off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves.

Faith in the reality of progress was thus the main characteristic of the early Victorian Age.

TENNYSON

(1809-1892)

Alfred Lord Tennyson is the most representative poet of the Victorian Age. His poetry is a record of the intellectual and spiritual life of the time. Being a careful student of science and philosophy

he was deeply impressed by the new discoveries and speculations which were undermining the orthodox religion and giving rise to all sorts of doubts and difficulties. Darwin's theory of Evolution which believed in the "struggle for Existence" and "the survival of the fittest especially upset and shook the foundation of religious faith. Thus there was a conflict between science and religion, doubt and faith, materialism and spirituality. These two voices of the Victorian age are perpetually heard in Tennyson's work. In *In Memoriam*, more than in any other contemporary literary work, we read of the great conflict between faith and doubt. Though he is greatly disturbed by the constant struggle going on in Nature which is "red in tooth and claw", his belief in evolution steadies and encourages him, and helps him to look beyond the struggle towards the "One far off event to which the whole creation moves."

Tennyson's poetry is so much representative of his age that a chronological study of it can help up to write its history. Thus his *Lockslay Hall* of 1842 reflects the restless spirit of 'young England' and its faith in science, commerce and the progress of mankind. In *Lockslay Hall Sixty Years After* (1866) the poet gives expression to the feeling of revulsion aroused against the new scientific discoveries which threatened the very foundations of religion, and against commerce and industry which had given rise to some very ugly problems as a result of the sordid greed of gain. In *The Princess*, Tennyson dealt with an important problem of the day—that of the higher education of women and their place in the fast changing conditions of modern society. In *Maud* he gave expression to the patriotic passion aroused on account of the Crimean War. In *Idylls of Kings*, in spite of its medieval machinery, contemporary problems were dealt with by the poet. Thus in all these poems the changing moods of the Victorian Age are successively represented—doubts, misgivings, hopefulness etc.

Taking Tennyson's poetry as a whole, we find that in spite of varieties of moods, it is an exposition of the cautious spirit of Victorian liberalism. He was essentially the poet of law and order as well as of progress. He was a great admirer of English traditions, and though he believed in divine evolution of things

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

he was, like a true Englishman, against anything that smacked of revolution.

But the real greatness of Tennyson as a poet lies in his being a supreme artist. The ideas contained in his poems are often condemned by his critics as commonplace, and he is berated as a shallow thinker. But no one can deny his greatness as an artist. He is, perhaps, after Milton, the most conscientious and accomplished poetic artist in English literature. He is noteworthy for the even perfection of his style and wonderful mastery of language which is at once simple and ornate. Moreover, there is an exquisite and varied music in his verse. In poetic style he has shown a uniform mastery which is not surpassed by any other English poet except Shakespeare. As an artist, Tennyson has an imagination less dramatic than lyrical, and he is usually at his best when he is kindled by personal emotion, personal experience. It is his fine talent for lyric which gives him a high place among the masters of English verse. Some of his shorter pieces, such as *Break, break, break ; Tear, idle tears*; *Crossing the Bar* are among the finest English songs on account of their distinction of music and imagery.

Tennyson is a master of imaginative description which is seen at its best in *The Lotus Eaters*. Words can hardly be more beautiful or more expressive than in such a stanza as this :

> A land of streams ! some, like a downward smoke,
> Slow-dropping, veils of thinnest lawn did go ;
> And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke
> Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below
> They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
> From the inner land ; far off, three mountain tops,
> Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
> Stood sunset flush'd and dew'd with showery drops
> Up clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

During his life time Tennyson was considered as the greatest poet of his age, but after his death a reaction started against him, and he was given a much lower rank among the English poets. But with the passage of time Tennyson's poetry regained its lost position and at present his place as one of the greatest poets of England is secure mainly on account of the artistic perfection of his verse.

With the appearance of the first volume of poems, Tennyson was hailed as a shining star rising on the firmament of English poetry. His friend, Hallam, wrote in 1831: "One of the faithful Islam, a poet

in the truest and highest sense, we are anxious to present to our readers. He has yet written little and published less; but in these 'preludes of a loftier strain' we recognise the inspiring god. Mr. Tennyson belongs decidedly to the class we have already described as poets of sensation. He sees all the forms of nature with *eruditus oculus* and his ear has a fairy fineness. There is a strange earnestness in his worship of beauty which throws a charm over his impassioned song, more easily felt than described, and not to be escaped by those who have once felt it. We think he has more definiteness and roundness of general conception than the late Mr. Keats, and is much more free from blemishes of diction and hasty caprices of fancy.......

"We have remarked five distinct excellences of his own manner. First, his luxiarance of imagination, and at the same time his control over it. Secondly, his power of embodying himself in ideal characters, or rather moods of character, with such extreme accuracy of adjustment, that the circumstances of the narration seem to have a natural correspondence with the predominant feeling, and, as it were, to be evolved from it by assimilative force. Thirdly, his vivid, picturesque delineation of objects, and the peculiar skill with which he holds all of them *fused*, to borrow a metaphor from science, in a medium of strong emotion. Fourthly, the variety of his lyrical measures, and exquisite modulation of harmonious words, and cadences to the smell and fall of the feelings expressed. Fifthly, the elevated habits of thought, implied in these compositions, and imparting a mellow soberness of tone, more impressive to our minds, than if the author had drawn up a set of opinions on verse, and sought to instruct the understanding rather than to communicate the love of beauty to the heart."

Tennyson was specially praised for presenting in his poetry a mirror of the diverse and complex age in which he lived. Referring to this Sterling wrote in *The Quarterly Review* (1842) : "Out of an age so diversified and as yet so unshapely, he who draws forth any graceful and expressive forms is well entitled to high praise. Turning into fixed beauty any part of the shifting and mingled matter of our time, he does what in itself is very difficult, and affords valuable help to all his future fellow-labourers. If he has not given us back our age as a whole transmuted into crystalline clearness and lustre, a work accomplished only by a few of the greatest minds under the happiest circumstances of their art, yet, we scarce know to whom we should

be equally grateful as to him who has enriched as with any shapes of lasting loveliness won from the vague and formless infinite."

Tennyson's artistic excellence made a special appeal to the critics and readers. Kingsley wrote in 1850 : "Mr. Tennyson's instinctive choice of tone, his mastery of language, which always fits the right word to the right thing, and that word always the simplest one, and the perfect ear for melody which makes it superfluous to set to music poetry which, read by the veriest schoolboy, makes music of itself—are all admirable. The poem (*The Princess*), we are glad to say, is so well known that it seems unnecessary to quote from it; yet there are here and there gems of sound expression of which, however well our readers may know them, we cannot forbear reminding them again. For instance, the end of the idyll in book vii, beginning, 'Come down, O maid' (the whole of which is perhaps one of the most perfect fruits of the poet's genius) :

> Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn,
> The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
> And murmuring of innumerable bees.

"Who, after three such lines, will talk of English as a harsh and clumsy language, and seek in the effeminate and monotonous Italian for expressive melody of sound ? Who cannot hear in them the rapid rippling of the water, the stately calmness of the wood-dove's note, and, in the repetition of short syllables and soft liquids in the last line, the

> Murmuring of innumerable bees."

After his death Tennyson's poetry was attacked for its lack of profundity of thought. He was considered not a thinker, but an utterer of thought. For example Leslie Stephen wrote in *Studies of a Biographer* (1899) : "When Tennyson is presented to us as giving the true solution of the doubts which beset our time, we should have some positive as well as negative testimony to his merit. We cannot, it is true, expect a full solution. A gentleman is reported to have asked him whether the existence of evil was not the great difficulty. Tennyson certainly could not be expected to throw much light upon Job's difficulties, and seems to have judiciously diverted conversation by referring to the 'charge of the heavy brigade'. No poet and indeed no philosopher, can be asked to solve the eternal problems off-hand. What we do see, is that Tennyson, like many noble and deep thinkers, was terribly perplexed by the alternatives apparently offered : by his

aversion on one side to certain orthodox dogmas, and by his dread and hatred of some tendencies which claim at least to be scientific. His ideal hero was the man who faced doubts boldly and attained clear convictions of one kind or other. On the other hand, he is always haunted by the fear of depriving your sister of her 'happy views', and praises a philosopher for keeping his doubts to himself. The resulting attitude of mind may not be morbid. Certainly it may fairly be called pathetic and even those who do not sympathise with his doctrine will do well to feel for his distress. It may teach them, at least, what is in any case worth knowing; why their teaching is so repulsive to many tender and delicate minds. But I confess to share Carlyle's regret for the loss of the old heroic tone of the 'Ulysses'. Noble poetry, let us admit, may express either faith or scepticism; a conviction that we know or that we can never know; it may be openly pessimistic, or expressive of an enthusiastic faith in the future; but Tennyson, even in the *In Memoriam*, always seems to me to be like a man clinging to a spar left floating after a shipwreck, knowing that it will not support him, and yet never able to make up his mind to strike out and take his chance of sinking and swimming. That may be infinitely affecting, but it is not the attitude of the poet who can give a war-cry to his followers, or of a philosopher who really dares to 'face the spectres of the mind'."

Though in modern times Tennyson is still regarded as a shallow thinker, he is given a place of honour among the English poets on account of the dim spiritual vision he saw, and which he rendered so musically in his poetry. Harold Nicolson thus remarked in his book, *Tennyson* (1923) : "And thus, in that 'ever-moaning battle in the mist' which was the spiritual life of Tennyson, there were sudden penetrating moments when he would obtain :—

> A glimpse of that dark world where I was born;

when, once again, the 'old mysterious glimmer' would steal into his soul, and when, in a sombre flash of vision, he would see his life :—

> all dark and red—a tract of sand,
> And someone pacing there alone,
> Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,
> Lit with a low large moon.

"To the vibration of so sad a cadence I should wish to leave him, trusting that the ultimate impression, thus attuned, will prove more poignant and more durable than any hollow reverence for what

was once admired. The age of Tennyson is past ; the ideals which he voiced so earnestly have fallen from esteem. The day may come, perhaps, when the conventions of that century will once again inspire the thoughtful or animate the weak. But, for the moment, it is not through these that any interest can be evoked. And thus, if we consider it reasonable and right that Tennyson should also stand among the poets, let us, for the present, forget the *delicate Laureate of a cautious age*; *the shallow thought*, *the vacant compromise*; *the honeyed idyll*, *the complacent ode*; let us forget the dulled monochrome of his middle years, forget the mangolia and the roses, the indolent Augusts of his island-home; forget the laurels and the rhododendrous.

"Let us recall only the low booming of the North Sea upon the dunes; the grey clouds lowering above the world; the moan of the night wind on the fen; the far glimmer of marsh-pools through the reeds; the cold, the half-light, and the gloom."

Giving an appreciation of Tennyson's poetry, Auden has written in his *Introduction to Tennyson, A Selection* (1946) : "In no other English poet of comparable rank does the bulk of his work seem so clearly to be inspired by some single and probably very early experience.

Tennyson's own description of himself as

> An infant crying in the night;
> An infant crying for the light;
> And with no language but a cry.

is extraordinarily acute. If Wordsworth is the great English poet of Nature, then Tennyson is the great English poet of the Nursery *i.e.*, his poems deal with human emotions in their most primitive states, uncomplicated by conscious sexuality or intellectual rationalisation. (No other poetry is easier, and less illuminating, to psycho-analysis).

"Two admissions of Tennyson, that the first poetry which excited him was his own, and that at the age of five he used to walk about saying 'Alfred', 'Alfred', are significant, as are his lines on science,

> Let science prove we are, and then
> What matters science unto men.

"Two questions: Who am I? Why do I exist? and the panic fear of their remaining unanswered, seem to have obsessed him all his life. Why he should have felt them so strongly and at such an early age we cannot, of course, know...

"But whatever the initiating cause, Tennyson became conscious in childhood of Hamlet's problem, the religious significance of his own existence. Emotions of early childhood are hard to express except accidentally because the original events associated with them are not remembered. Hallam's death, a repetition of the abandonment experience, gave Tennyson the symbolic event which mobilised what he had already suffered and gave his fear a focus."

Now let us examine the main characteristics of Tennyson as a poet :—

1. Tennyson—the Most Representative Poet of His Age. Tennyson was the most complete and comprehensive representative of the Victorian age. He belonged to one of the crucial ages of modern civilisation ; and, among all English writers of that age, he was the most representative. Tennyson believed that it was his function as a poet to penetrate and to interpret the inner meaning of the modern spirit, to find a poetic expression alike for its religion and science. That he won no small measure of success in this purpose is attested by the fact that one of the greatest scientists of the times, Huxley, pronounced him to be "the first poet since Lucretius who has understood the drift of science." As to the other side, *In Memoriam* has been as a gospel to thousands of souls who have felt the movement of modern thought and yet been conscious of the need of religion.

Referring to the representative character of Tennyson's poety, Lyall has observed in his book on Tennyson in the *English Men of Letters* series: "Tennyson's popularity grew steadily and spread so widely for nearly sixty years, and his influence over his generation has been so remarkable, that his finest poetry may undoubtedly be treated as an illustrative record of the prevailing spirit, of the temperament, and to some degree of the national character of his period.

"If we descend from the sphere of lofty speculation, and turn to the positive and practical aspects of Tennyson's poetry, we may allow that it undoubtedly represents the ideas and tastes of Englishmen belonging to his class and his generation. Moderation in politics, refined culture, religious liberalism chequered by doubt, a lively interest in the advance of scientific discovery coupled with alarm that it might lead us astray, attachment to ancient institutions, larger views of the duty of the State towards its people—all these feelings and tendencies find their expression in Tennyson's poems, and will be recognised as the salient features of the national character. In the

direction of political ideals his imaginative faculty enabled him sometimes not only to discern the movement, but also to lead the way. The imperial conception—realising the British Empire's unity in multiplicity, regarding it as deep-rooted tree which sustains and nourishes its flourishing branches while the branches in return give support and vitality to the stem—was proclaimed in his verse before it had attained conspicuous popularity. He saw the edifice had been quietly set by the builders who made no noise over the work; and he called upon all English-speaking folk to join hands and consolidate it. The revival and spread of profound veneration for the Throne as the common centre and head of scattered dominion, is another outcome of the same idea that owes its development to the last thirty years of Queen Victoria's reign; and some share in promoting it may fairly be attributed it to Tennyson's stately verse. In all these respects, therefore, it will be right for the future historian to treat Tennyson as a representative of the Victorian period, and to draw inferences from his work as to the general, intellectual and political tendencies of the nineteenth century."

In the realm of thought the nineteenth century is always associated with the theory of Evolution. With the idea of Evolution Tennyson's mind was saturated. No poet of equal rank has ever been more dominated by an idea as was Tennyson by this, taking the word in its wider philosophical and not merely its biological sense. His creative thought was rooted in the scientific theories of his age. Oliver Lodge, a scientist, who himself played a part in the turmoil of the later nineteenth century, best described what Tennyson meant to his contemporaries, at a time when the fierce dispute between the scientists and the theologians shook intellectual Europe: "In the conflict between Science and Faith our business was to accept the one without rejecting the other; and that he achieved. Never did his acceptance of the animal ancestry of man, for instance, upset his belief in the essential divinity of the human soul, its immortality, its supremacy, its eternal destiny."

Tennyson was Darwin's contemporary; and when *The Origin of Species* appeared at the end of 1859, the poet had already been pondering over the subject of Evolution as deeply and as long as the biologist himself, if not exactly from the same angle. This is clear from some of the original stanzas in *The Palace of Art* written in 1832. In *The Princess* Tennyson proclaims:

> The world was once a fluid haze of light,
> Till toward the centre set the starry tides,

And eddied into suns, that wheeling cast,
The planets ; then the monster, then the man.

He refers to the struggle for existence and natural selection in *In Memoriam.*

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams ?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life,
That I considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds,
She often brings out one to bear.
I falter where I firmly trod.

The conception of the universal law, that came in his youth to be held by thinkers who understood the conclusion of science, permeates Tennyson's poetry from end to end. Thus he says in *In Memoriam* :

That nothing walks with aimless feet ;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void
When God hath made the pile complete.

The impact of science did not shake the belief of the Victorians in religion, God and soul. They tried to reconcile science and religion. This is exactly what we find in Tennyson. Thus in *The Higher Pantheism* he proclaims his acceptance of the legitimate conclusion of science, but decisively rejects its further conclusion, which came to be that of the scientific materialists of the later part of the nineteenth century :

God is law, say the wise ; O Soul, and let us rejoice,
For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet his voice,
Law is God, say some ; no God at all, say the fool ;
For all we have power to see it straight staff bent in a pool.

In the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* Tennyson says:

For though the Giant Ages heave the hill
And break the shore, and evermore
Make and break, and work their will ;
Though world on world in myriads roll
Round us, each with different powers,
And other forms of life than ours,
What know we greater than the soul.

Tennyson was thus not, like one or another of his compeers, re-

presentative of the melody, wisdom, passion, or other partial phase of the Victorian era, but of the time itself, with its diverse elements in harmonious conjunction. In his verse he is as truly "the glass of fashion and the mould of form" of the Victorian generation in the nineteenth century as Spenser was of the Elizabethan court, Milton of the Protectorate, and Pope of the reign of Queen Anne.

2. **Tennyson and the Victorian Compromise.** The Victorian age was an age of great problems and conflicts which could not be easily resolved. But as the people wanted to live in peace, they approached these problems not straight but obliquely. Tennyson also dealt with them from the gentler angle of compromise in his poetry more than any of his contemporaries. Referring to the problems facing the Victorians and the fundamental compromising attitude of the Victorians to these problems Harold Nicholson writers in his book, *Tennyson*: "The optimism of the nineteenth century was not, in its essence, a very spontaneous quality; there was something deliberate about it... The Victorians lived, as Drinkwater has said, in an atmosphere of 'violent uncertainty'. In their trouble they turned as timid people turn on such occasions, to subconscious suggestions; they assured themselves that they, and civilisation, were getting better and better all the time; they assured themselves that never had so pressing a demand for great political and spiritual leaders been met by so abundant, so miraculous a supply; that the millennium was indeed realisable, and in fact imminent. As dècade followed decade, it became increasingly difficult for them to repeat this formula with absolute conviction; it became obvious that some thing indefinable was wrong with the condition of England. Their commercial prosperity, glorious as it was, had brought with it the increase of the industrial population, and this in its turn, was leading to radicalism, to trade unions; nay even worse: the discoveries of science, glorious as they were, had already shaken religious opinion, and were driving men to atheism or even to Rome...

"The Victorians were able triumphantly to escape from truth, if it showed signs of becoming unpleasant. But there were three truths, however, from which even the Victorians failed to escape with their usual dexterity. There was democracy; there was the growth of unbelief and there was sex. None of these problems could be permanently dismissed as non-existent: they were problems which, however unpleasant they might be, it was essential in the end to

face. And as the Victorians were singularly averse from facing anything, they approached these three problems obliquely and from the gentler angle of compromise.

"Of these three compromises, the one that covered the sex problem was perhaps the most blatant, certainly the most persistent, and for the moment the most successful. Their object was to discover some middle course between the unbridled licentiousness of previous ages and the complete negations of the functions and purposes of nature. For though they repudiated the voluptuousness of their fathers, yet no average Victorian was so narrow-minded as to preach the complete, the absolute mortification of the flesh. It was essential, it was *right*, that the British race should be propagated. With a sigh of hope and of relief they decided that this biological necessity could be elevated into a moral—nay, even a civic—virtue. And in this way evolved the ideal of the English home."

Tennyson was singularly well adapted to the reception and the exploitation of this ideal. Referring to this Stopford Brooke has observed : "*The Miller's Daughter* is a simple story of true sweet—hearting and married love, but raised into a steady and grave emotion worthy of a love built to last for life betwixt a man and a woman. This was the sort of love for which Tennyson cared, for which Byron and Shelley did not care, which was in the world where Keats lived not at all. It is but rarely that we can detect in Tennyson's poems any convincing note of physical passion. He concentrated very firmly upon the advantage of spiritual as opposed to physical love. The latter, he feels, should, wherever possible, be avoided. 'Arise', he says :

> Arise and fly
> The reeling Faun, the sensual feast ;
> Move upward, working out the beast,
> And let the ape and tiger lie.

and even in *Maud* the hero, unbalanced as he was, exclaims :

> And most of all would I fly from the cruel madness of love,
> The honey of poison-flowers and all the measureless ill,
> Ah, Maud, you milk-white fawn, you are all unmeet for a wife,
> Your mother is mute in her grave as her image in marble above;
> Your father is ever in London, you wonder about at your will ;
> You have but fed on the roses and lain in the lilies of life.

"Tennyson is thus pre-eminently the poet of domestic virtues, and he possesses an almost feminine sympathy for the tender delicacies of home. He could not even contemplate the possibility oı any relation between man and woman other than the conjugal.

The 'shadow of the world', the reflection of which so distressed the Lady of Shalott, included, indeed, it is true, 'two young lovers' walking together in the moonlight ; but we are at once reassured by the statement that these two lovers were 'lately wed'.

In his political opinions Tennyson shared the view of an average Victorian who believed in the golden mean, a compromise between democracy and aristocracy. He believed in slow progress, and shunned revolution. Tennyson had the instinctive distrust of the growing commercial aristocracy which is reflected in *Maud* ; the instinctive worship of the older territorial aristocracy which we get in *The Lord of Burleigh.* In the region of foreign and imperial politics Tennyson was equally the product of the Victorian upper middle class. The Victorians were serenely convinced that patriotism was all-sufficient, and that it was the highest civic virtue ; and this conviction is expressed in the poetry of Tennyson. He shared the current convictions of 'the white man's burden,' and he was convinced that subject races naturally preferred good British government to bad self-government.

In the matter of religion Tennyson was unduly perturbed by the contemporary controversies, and he took up a compromising positions between faith and doubt like the majority of the religious. minded intelligentsia. Referring to this Nicholson has remarked : "The majority of English people desired to be assured that all was for the best ; they desired to discover some compromise which, while not outraging their intellect and their reason, would nonetheless soothe their conscience and restore their faith, if not completely, at least sufficiently to allow them to believe in some ultimate purpose and more important still, in life after death. In voicing these doubts, in phrasing the inevitable compromise, Tennyson found, and endeavoured passionately to fulfil, his appointed mission."

3. Tennyson as a Lyrical Poet. Temperamentally Tennyson possessed all the qualities which should have rendered him one of the greatest and most original of the lyric poets of England. His poetic genius was essentially lyrical in quality, subjective and not objective, though it was marred only by the fact that he was unable, except in isolated moments, to dissociate his lyrical energy from other energies, dramatic, narrative, ethical, theological, and didactic. Referring to this point Nicholson has remarked : "Tennyson was intended to be a subjective poet, and was forced by circumstances into fifty years of unnatural

objectivity. He chose the easier and more prosperous course : he became the Laureate of his age ; he subordinated the lyric to the instructional. And his poetry thereby has lost one-half of its potential value."

Though for over fifty years the devotees of Tennyson prostrated themselves before the shrine which they had built for him, and he became inevitably less and less the lyric poet and more and more the civic prophet, the communal bard, yet he did manage to write quite a large number of beautiful lyrics which have given him a high place among the lyric poets of England. Giving an estimate of Tennyson as a lyrical poet, Harrison has observed in his book, *Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill and other Litreary Estimates* : "From the early *Claribel* to the final *Crossing the Bar*, separated by some sixty years of production, Tennyson's pure lyrics stand in front rank of English lyrical achievement. It is needless to dilate on what every one has admired—man, woman, child ; scholar, simple, critic, or general public. Nor has the praise and delight in this exquisite music been excessive or mistaken. It is a field where the student of Sappho and Catullus join hands with the girl in the classroom in unbounded admiration. The marvel is that these songs, with their luscious melody, their chiselling of phrase, their simple completeness, were the work of so young a poet, came forth full-fledged from the egg. That such pieces as *Mariana*, *Oriana*, *Fatima*, *the Merman* and *Mermaid*, should be thrown off by an unknown youth is amazing. That such a genius for melody should have retained to the age of eighty, and produced in old age songs like *The Throstle* and *Early Spring* is almost more amazing. The wealth as well as the beauty of Tennyson's lyrical productions places him in the foremost rank of our lyricists—strong as our literature has been for many centuries in that form of poetry.

"The unanimous voice of the public has been right in fastening on the best of these lyrics, so that they have become household words, as familiar as those of Milton or Burns. *The Miller's Daughter*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Break, break, break*, *The Dream of Fair Women*, *Locksley Hall*, *The Light Brigade* and *The Revenge* are equally popular. Above all are the songs in *The Brook*, in *The Princess*, and in *Maud*. Of them all, no doubt, the songs in *The Princess* are the most bewitching. 'The splendour falls on castle walls'—'Tears, idle tears'—'O swallow, swallow'—'Now sleeps the crimson petal'—and lastly 'Come down, O maid', with its miraculous couplet. 'The moan of doves'

—assuredly the most felicitous of imitative music in modern poetry, perhaps even in all English poetry."

4. **Tennyson as an Artist.** Tennyson considered poetry as an art, and from the very beginning of his poetic career he practised to attain perfection in poetic art. His high place among the poets of England is assured mainly on account of the artistic qualities of his verse. In this connection Harrison has pointed out that Tennyson's glory among the poets of his age rested mainly on the excellent qualities of his verse which was highly polished : "The crown has been won, partly by the fact that Tennyson embalmed in exquisite verse the current tastes, creeds, hopes, and sympathies of the larger part of the reading public in our age, but mainly it was won by the supreme perfection of his form. In early life he formed a poetic style of his own, of quite faultless precision—musical' simple and lucid. And in sixty years of poetic fecundity, his style may have gained in energy, but not in precision. It was never careless never, uncouth, never (or rarely) abscure. Every line was polished with the same unerring ear and the same infallible taste. In some sixty thousand lines it is rare to find a really false rhythm, a truly bungling verse, a crude confusion of epithets—such ragged stuff as Byron flung off on almost every page, such redundancies as Shelley or Keats would put forth in some hours of delirious rapture, such rank commonplaces as too often offend us in Wordsworth. Verses, so uniformly harmonious as those of Tennyson, with their witchery of words, yet so clear, so pure, so tender, so redolent of what is beautiful in nature, in man, woman—all this won over the entire public that cares for poetry, and truly deserves to win it.

"Even now full justice has hardly been done to Tennyson's supremacy in form, or, rather, the general reader, much as he loves his poems, is not quite aware of the infallible mastery of language they possess. In the whole range of English poetry, Milton alone can be held to show an equal or even greater uniformity of polish. Perfection and continuity of polish are certainly not the same thing as the highest poetry but they are the note of the consummate artist. English poetry, for all its splendid achievements, is not remarkable for uniform perfection of form, as compared with the best poetry of Rome, and of Italy. Shakespeare himself will at times break into rant, and he is inordinately prone to indulge in conceits and quips. Nearly all our poets have their bad ways—become careless, reckless, or prosy; lose complete self-control; or commit some error of taste, be it in haste, in passion, or some morbid condition of the creative

fancy. Gray always writes like the scholar and the critic that he was, and Pope always writes with the neatness of a French 'wit'. But neither can uniformly avoid the commonplace, and thus they cannot claim the crown of absolute poetic form. Milton never descends in his eagle's flight from the perfection of form. And more than all other poets, Tennyson, if he never soars to such heights as Milton, maintains this wonderful quality of measured beat.'

One of the greatest qualities of Tennyson as an artist is that his poems, especially shorter ones, possess a unity of impression and construction. In this connection Hugh Walker has observed in his book, *The Literature of the Victorian Era*: "It may well be questioned whether Tennyson ever well understood the building up of long poems; but he was extremely skilful in the construction of short pieces, and after 1832 he studied the art with greater care. The lighter pieces from the beginning, and from 1832 onwards the weightier ones as well, owe a great deal of their charm to the unity of impression which they convey. Always a poet of the fitting word and the exquisite phrase, Tennyson in his maturity never forgot the importance of the setting. Thus, *Ulysses* is the round and flawless delineation of the stoical mind.

Strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Few if any poems of equal length contain a greater number of gems of expression. It is absolutely free from anything that could be wished away, and to add anything to it would be 'wasteful and ridiculous excess'. *St. Stimeon* is a poem of a lower order : yet it is almost equally perfect in its own way as the diseased asceticism of the early saint. Again, *The Two Voices* and *The Vision of Sin* have the unity which belongs to a mental state vividly conceived. In *The Palace of Art* there is a greater complexity; but there is a unity no less real. Every stanza is made to illustrate the soul centred in itself, proud of its own strength, feeding upon and satisfied with beauty, looking not beyond this world—

"But the best proof of the great advance which Tennyson has made in the art of construction is to be found in *The Lotos-Eaters*, a piece which can hardly be paralleled except in Spenser or in Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*. It was a delicious poem even as it stood originally; and few, if Tennyson had not helped them, would have been conscious of any want. It is the poem of sensuous indulgence and enjoyment. In the land of lotos-eaters it seems 'always

afternoon'. Work is hateful, 'dreamful ease' is the only object of desire. Nay, so deep a drowsiness broods over the land that desire itself is a word too suggestive of action and effort to be appropriate. Now in 1832 *The Lotos Eaters* was already nearly perfect within its compass as a picture of this life of "dreamful ease'. But by 1842 Tennyson had convinced himself that it was incomplete. To use his own figure, it ought to have been a double *curve* rather than a single one. A moral being may resolve a life of voluptuous enjoyment; but, if he does, such a life will influence him morally as well as physically. The moral influence had been omitted in 1832 : it is recognised in the *Choric Song*, beginning, 'Dear is the memory of our wedded lives', which was added in 1842. Partly for the same reason the original conclusion was omitted and a new one was substituted. The introduction of the epicurean gods suggests thoughts reaching far beyond the lotos-land. But there were other grounds as well for this change. By the substitution Tennyson not only enriched *The Lotos Eaters* in thought, but ennobled in style.'

BROWNING
(1812—1889)

During his life time **Robert Browning** was not considered as great a poet as Tennyson, but after that the opinion of the critics changed in favour of Browning, who, on account of his depth and originality of thought, is ranked superior to Tennyson. Browning and Tennyson were contemporaries and their poetic careers ran almost parallel to each other, but as poets they presented a glaring contrast. Whereas Tennyson is first the artist and then the teacher, with Browning the message is always the important thing, and he is very careless of the form in which it is expressed. Tennyson always writes about subjects which are dainty and comely; Browning on the other hand, deals with subjects which are rough and ugly, and he aims to show that truth lies hidden in both the evil and the good. In their respective messages the two poets differed widely. Tennyson's message reflects the growing order of the age, and is summed up in the word 'law'. He believes in disciplining the individual will and subordinating it to the universal law. There is a note of resignation struck in his poetry, which amounts to fatalism. Browning, on the other hand, advocates the triumph of the individual will over the obstacles. In his opinion self is not subordinate but supreme. There is a robust optimism reflected in all his poetry. It is in fact because of his invincible will and optimism that Browning is given preference

over Tennyson whose poetry betrays weakness and helpless passimism. Browning's boundless energy, his cheerful courage, his faith in life and in the development that awaits beyond the portals of death, give a strange vitality to his poetry. It is his firm belief in the immortality of the soul which forms the basis of his generous optimism, beautifully expressed in the following lines of *Pippa Passes* :

The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven ;
The hill side's dew pearled
The lark's on the wing ;
The snail's on the thorn,
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world.

Thus in an age when the minds of men were assailed by doubt, Browning spoke the strongest words of hope and faith :

Grow old along with me !
The best is yet to be.
The last of life, for which the first was made.

(*Rabbi Ben Ezra*).

In another way also Browning presents a contrast to Tennyson. Whereas Tennyson's genius is mainly lyrical, Browning's is predominantly dramatic, and his greatest poems are written in the form of the dramatic monologue. Being chiefly interested in the study of the human soul, he discusses in poem after poem, in the form of monologue or dialogue, the problems of life and conscience. And in all of them Browning himself in the central character, and he uses the hero as his own mouthpiece. His first poem *Pauline* (1833) which is a monologue addressed to Pauline, on 'the incidents in the development of a soul', is autobiographical—a fragment of personal confession under a thin dramatic disguise. His *Paracelsus* (1835) which is in form a drama with four characters, is also a story of 'incidents in the development of a soul', of a Renaissance physician in whom true science and charlatanism were combined. Paracelsus has the ambition of attaining truth and transforming the life of man. For this purpose he discards emotion and love, and fails on account of this mistake. Browning in this poem also uses the hero as a mouthpiece of his own ideas and aspiration. *Paracelsus* was followed by *Sordello* (1840), which is again 'the study of the soul'. It narrates in heroic verse the life of a little-known Italian poet. On account of its involved expression its obscurity has become proverbial. In

Pipa Passes (1841) Browning produced a drama partly lyrical, and consisting of isolated scenes. Here he imagined the effect of the songs of a little working girl, strolling about during a holiday, on the destiny of the very different persons who hear them in turn.

It was with the publication of a series of collections of disconnected studies, chiefly monologues, that Browning's reputation as a great poem was firmly established. These volumes were—*Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), *Men and Women* (1855), *Dramatics Personae* (1864), *Dramatic Idylls* (1879-80). The dramatic lyrics in these collections were a poetry of a new kind in England. In them Browning brings the most varied personages to make their confessions to us. Some of them are historical, while others are the products of Browning's imagination, but all of them, while unravelling the tangled web of their emotions and thoughts, give expression to the optimistic philosophy of the poet. Some of the important dramatic lyrics are *Bishop Bloughram's Apology*, *Two in a Gondola*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *The Last Ride Together*, *Childe Roland to a Dark Tower Came*, *A Grammarian's Funeral*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *Prospice* and *My Last Duchess*. All of them have won for Browning the applause of readers who value 'thought' in poetry. In (1868-69) Browning brought out four successive volumes of *The Ring and the Book*, which is his masterpiece. Here different persons concerned in a peculiarly brutal set of murders, and many witnesses give their own versions of the same events, varying them according to their different interests and prejudices. The lawyers also have their say, and at the end the Pope sums up the case. The ten long successive monologues contain the finest psychological studies of characters ever attempted by a poet.

During the last twenty years of his life Browning wrote a number of poems. Though they do not have much poetic merit, yet they all give expression to his resolute courage and faith. In fact Browning is mainly remembered for the astonishing vigour and hope that characterise all his work. He is the poet of love, of life, and of the will to live, here and beyond the grave, as he says in the song of David in his poem Soul :

> How good is man's life, the mere living ! how fit to employ
> All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy.

The chief fault of Browning's poetry is its obscurity. This is mainly due to the fact that his thought is often so obscure or subtle that language cannot express it perfectly. Being interested in the

study of the individual soul, never exactly alike in any two men, he seeks to express the hidden motives and principles which govern individual action. Thus in order to understand his poems, the reader has always to be mentally alert ; otherwise he fails to understand his fine shades of psychological study. To a certain extent Browning himself is to be blamed for his obscurity, because he is careless as an artist. But in spite of obscurity, Browning is the most stimulating poet in the English language. His influence on the reader who is prepared to sit up, and think and remain alert when he reads his poetry, is positive and tremendous. His strength, his joy of life, his robust faith and his invincible optimism enter into the life of serious reader of his poetry, and makes him a different man. That is why, after thirty years of continuous work, his merit was finally recognised, and he was placed beside Tennyson and even considered greater. In the opinion of some critics he is the greatest poet in English literature since Shakespeare.

Unlike Tennyson, Browning has not been a controversial figure. There would seem to be no 'Browning problem', no critical issue. All the readers of his poetry have responded to the vigour and impetus of his characteristic zest for life. In fact with many of his readers the real attraction of Browning's poetry is in the incident, the character, the gusto of the monologue. And as this attraction is by no means special or proper to poetry, because it is shared with prose fiction, and also with drama, Browning's strongest supporters are the novelists and prose-writers. The modern novel is especially indebted to Browning for the deep psychological study of the individual soul which his poetry preaches and the message which it conveys.

Carlyle who appreciated the substance of Browning's poems, and wanted him to write in prose to make his message more clearly understood by a wider public, wrote to him in 1814 : "Unless I very greatly mistake, judging from these two works (*Sordello* and *Pippa Passes*), you seem to possess a rare spiritual gift, poetical, pictorial, intellectual, by whatever name we may prefer calling it; to unfold which into articulate clearness is naturally the problem of all problems for you. This noble endowment, it seems to me farther, you are *not* at present on the best way for unfolding...

"A long battle, I could guess, lies before you, full of toil and pain, and all sorts of real fighting ; a man attains to nothing here below without that. Is it not verily the highest prize you fight for? Fight on ; that is to say, follow truly, with steadfast singleness of

purpose, with valiant humbleness and openness of heart, what best light you can attain to ; following truly, so, better and ever better light will rise in you. The light we ourselves gain, by our very errors if not otherwise, is the only precious light. Victory, what I call victory, if well fought for, is sure to you.

"If your own choice happened to point that way, I for one should hail it as a good omen that your next work were written in prose. But unless poetic faculty mean a higher power of common understanding, I know not what it means. One must first make a *true* intellectual representation of a thing, before any poetic interest that is true will supervene."

Commenting on *The Bishop orders his Tomb in St. Praxed's Church*, Ruskin wrote in *Modern Painters* (1843) : "I know no other piece of modern English prose or poetry, in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit,—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin. It is nearly all that I have said of the central Renaissance in thirty pages of the *Stones of Venice* put into as many lines. The worst of it is that this kind of concentrated writing needs so much *solution* before the reader can fairly get the good of it, that people's patience fails them, and they give the thing up as insoluble."

Bagehot who considered Browning as the practitioner of *grotesque* art in contrast with the *ornate* art of Tennyson, wrote in 1864 : "We are fortunate in not having to hunt out of past literature an illustrative specimen of the ornate style. Mr. Tennyson has just given one admirable in itself, and most characteristic of the defects and merits of this style. The story of *Enoch Arden*, as he has enhanced and presented it, is a rich and splendid composite of imagery and illustration. Yet how simple is that story in itself !...Told in the pure and simple, the unadorned and classical style, this story would not have taken three pages, but Mr. Tennyson has been able to make it principal—the largest tale in the new volume. He has done so only by giving to every event and incident in the volume an accompanying commentary...

"Ornate art, indeed, uses undue disguises and unreal enchantments ; it does not confine itself to the best types...but ornate art, as much as pure art, catches its subject in the best light it can, takes the most developed aspect of it which it can find, and throws upon it the most congruous colours it can use. But grotesque art does

just the contrary. It takes the type, so to say, in *difficulties*. It gives a representation of it in its maximum development, amid the circumstances least favourable to it, just while it is struggling with obstacles, just where it is encumbered with incongruities. It deals, to use the language of science, not with normal types but with abnormal specimens.

"Of this art we possess in the present generation one prolific master. Mr. Browning is an artist working by incongruity. Possibly hardly one of his considerable efforts can be found which is not great because of its odd mixture. He puts together things which no one else would have put together, and produces on our minds a result which no one else would have produced, or tried to produce. His admirers may not like all we may have to say of him. But in our way we too are among his admirers. No one ever read him without seeing not only his great ability but his great *mind*. He not only possesses superficial useable talents, but the strong something, the inner secret something, which uses them and controls them ; he is great not in mere accomplishments, but in himself. He has applied a hard, strong intellect to real life ; he has applied the same intellect to the problems of his age. He has striven to know what *is* ; he has endeavoured not to be cheated by counterfeits, not to be infatuated by illusions. His heart is in what he says. He has battered his brain against his creed till he believes it. He is at once a student of mysticism and a citizen of the world."

Refuting the charge of obscurity which is generally laid against Browning, Swinburne wrote in 1875 : "The charge of obscurity is perhaps of all charges the likeliest to impair the fame or to imperil the success of a rising or an established poet. It is as often misapplied by hasty or ignorant criticism as any other on the roll of accusations; and was never misapplied more persistently than and perversely to an eminent writer of our own time. The difficulty found by many in certain of Mr. Browning's works arises from a quality the reverse of that which produces obscurity properly so called. Obscurity is the natural product of turbid forces and confused ideas; of a feeble and clouded or of a vigorous but unfixed and chaotic intellect. Now if there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning's intellect it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. He is something too much the reverse of obscure; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with

such incessant rapidity, or even to realise With that spider-like swiftness and sagacity his building spirit leaps and lightens to and fro and backward and forward as it lives along the animated line of its labour, springs from thread to thread and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought woven from inexhaustible stores of his perception and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination. He never thinks but at full speed; and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a wagon or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway. It is hopeless to enjoy the charm or apprehend the gist of his writing except with a mind thoroughly alert, an attention awake at all points, a spirit open and ready to be kindled by the contact of the writer's. To do justice to any book which deserve, any other sort of justice than that of the fire or the waste-paper basket, it is necessary to read it in the fit frame of mind; and the proper mood in which to study for the first time a book of Mr. Browning is the freshest, clearest, most active mood of the mind in its brightest and keenest hours of work."

Pater who admired Browning's psychological study of the individual soul, and considered him, therefore, a modern poet, wrote in 1887: "The individual, the personal, the concrete, as distinguished from yet revealing in its fulness, the general, the universal—that is Mr. Browning's chosen subject-matter: 'Every man is for him an epitome of the universe, a centre of creation.' It is always the particular soul, the particular act or episode, as the flower of the particular soul —the act or episode by which its quality comes to the test—in which he interests us. With him it is always a 'drama of the interior, a tragedy or comedy of the soul, to see thereby how each soul becomes conscious of itself.' In the Preface to the later edition of *Sordello*, Mr. Browning himself told us that to him little else seems worth study except the development of a soul, the incidents, the story, of that. And in fact, the intellectual public generally agrees with him. It is because he has administered with such marvellous vigour, and variety and fine skill to interest, that he is the most modern, to modern people the most important, of poet."

Henry James, the novelist, who also admired Browning for his 'modernity', and being different from all other poet's wrote in *Browning in Westminster Abbey*: "It is as a tremendous and incomparable modern that the author of *Men and Women* takes his place (in the assembly of great English poets who lie buried in Westminster Abbey). He introduces to his predecessors a kind of contemporary

individualism which surely for many a year they had not been reminded of with any such force. The tradition of the poetic character as something high, detached and simple, which may be assumed to have prevailed among them for a good while, is one that Browning had broken at every turn. A good many oddities and a good many great writers have been entombed in the Abbey; but none of the odd ones have been so great and none of the great ones so odd. There are plenty of poets whose right to the title may be contested, but there is no poetic head of equal power—crowned and recrowned by almost importunate hands—from which so many people would withhold the distinctive wreath...

"Just as his great sign to those who knew him was that he was a force of health, of temperament, of tone; so what he takes into the Abbey is an immense expression of life—of life rendered with large liberty and free experiment, with an unprejudiced intellectual eagerness to put himself in other people's place, to participate in complications and consequences; a restlessness of psychological research that might well alarm any pale company for their formal orthodoxies."

Lubbock, who admired Browning for his courageously facing life in all its aspects, wrote in 1912: "All his affinities brought him into the open. Far from taking shelter from life, he had not even his back to the wall; he stood forward with all life round him. He flung his mind wide to it and absorbed it, delighted with its staring colours, fascinated by its grotesque shapes and contrasts...

"Not the evasion of life, which somehow claims us again soon enough, but the translation of the whole of it to the level of passion—that was Browning's achievement, and it has almost been his alone. No one else, not Shakespeare himself, has written poetry which, whatever happens, has to be lived from day to day—can be sustained and continued. Nothing in the necessities of ordinary existence is contradicted by these poems at their greatest intensity. Browning's grave and searching realism evades no difficulties here, and never condescends to the idea that beauty is exquisite or pleasure rare if either is thought as separable from the sum of life.

"Thus it is, then, that he is able to linger among the emotional refinements and ingenuities which he so loves to explore, without forfeiting in their minuteness the ardour and glow of passionate beauty. His passion is living and enduring because it has understood that nothing can endure—however brilliant its moment of climax—which is

discontinuous with all else. There are features in his work, obvious enough, which have suggested to some an affinity between his treatment of these themes and that which is to be seen in the lyrical poems of Donne; and indeed, it is there if anywhere that we shall find it. But Donne, precisely, bringing the same fire to the same intricacies of experience, shows only too often how easily the simplicity of true passion may be damaged in the quest for an ever closer notation of the labyrinth. Browning, with a brain far inferior, indeed, for keenness and force, could yet indulge to all length its subtlety of perception, without losing his relation to reality, because he had once for all achieved simplicity first. And if it was this that gave him his control over complexity, it is to this, and to nothing less, that is due to the entirely unique savour of his style. Browning's handling of the words, in the best of his lyric poetry, become more and more of a wonder, the deeper they fix themselves in the mind; and we end—where we do not perhaps begin—by discovering, under the appearance of informality, how instantly sensitive they prove themselves to his touch. Their response is so quick that the movement by which they slip into their places escapes us; they do not make the gesture, of one sort or another, that in other writers enables us to watch the process of expression. It is an artless judgment which concludes that with Browning there was no process, that language was an obstacle to his bursting thought, which broke down unscrupulously, careless so long as his thought got through. Language, rather obeyed the candour of his passion, and answered by yielding his effects of beauty which, when we look at the extreme simplicity of the means, it seems impossibe to analyse."

Now let us examine the main characteristics of Browning as a poet:—

1. **Browning's Obscurity.** The charge of obscurity has been generally brought against the poetry of Browning. One of his contemporary critics disposed of his earlier poems as 'a piece of pure bewilderment'. Carlyle reported that his wife had read *Sordello* through without being able to make out whether Sordello was a man or a city or a book. A very popular story showing the reception of *Sordello* is related by Chesterton : "Perhaps the best story, however, of all the cycle of Sordello legends is that which is related of Douglas Jerrold. He was recovering from an illness ; and having obtained permission for the first time to read a little during the day, he picked up a book from a pile beside the bed and began *Sordello.* No sooner had he done so than he turned deadly pale, put down the

book, and said, 'My God, I'm an idiot. My health is restored, but my mind is gone. I can't understand two consecutive lines of an English poem.' He then summoned his family and silently gave the book into their hands asking for their opinion on the poem ; and as the shadow of perplexity passed over their faces, he heaved a sigh of relief and went to sleep." Thus the reception which was accorded to Sordello was unique. It became a fashion to boast of not understanding it.'

There are three main causes of Browning's 'obscurity'. In the first place, it is his peculiar style which is unfamiliar to the ordinary reader. He often writes in telegraphic language and leaves too much to the imagination. This, of course, is peculiar to Browning's temperament, and not a deliberate attempt to confound the reader because whenever he likes he can be as lucid as any poet. Secondly Browning sought his subjects in many remote regions and his allusions are drawn from many little known sources, which create difficulty for the ordinary reader. Thirdly, Browning's obscurity is exaggerated by the easy-going reader who refuses to use his brains while reading his poetry, and looks upon it as a form of light entertainment. Browning is a thinker of extraordinary depth and subtlety ; his themes are seldom superficial, often very remote, and his thought is, moreover, swift as it is subtle, which is naturally beyond the comprehension of a dull reader.

Browning himself explained that his poetry was not meant to amuse people : it was the vehicle of deep thought, and as such it could not be understood by the indolent reader. In his letter to Kingsland, the author of *Robert Browning : Chief Poet of the Age*, Browning remarked : "I never designedly tried to puzzle people, as some of my critics have supposed. On the other hand, I never pretended to offer such literature as should be substitute for a cigar, or a game of dominoes to an idle man." On account of Browning's explanation of his attitude to poetry and what he expected from his readers, the obscurity of his verse was a lesser problem to succeeding generations than to men of his own time. The best defence against the charge of 'obscurity' from the poem of Swinburne, who wrote : "He is something too much of the reverse of obscure ; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity."

In spite of Browning's own explanation, and the defence of

Swinburne, and some modern critics like Chesterton and Symons, the fact remains that Browning is a difficult poet. He may not be obscure; he certainly is often enigmatic on account of his peculiar style and mannerism, which need deliberate effort on the part of the reader to become familiar with.

2. Browning's Handling of Dramatic Monologue. It was through assiduous trial that Browning discovered that his genius, though dramatic, was not fitted for the production of stage plays. Even the best of his seven or eight dramas, *The Blot on the Scutcheon*, betrayed his limitations. His is not the drama of the outer world of events, but the inner world of the soul, where nothing is of importance until it is transmuted into a form influencing mind and character. As he passed more and more intently into the half-hidden crevices and shadowy secrecies of the mind, Browning wrought for himself a novel form in which to depict the novel reading of man namely the dramatic monologue.

In his introduction to Browning's poems, Young defines the dramatic monologue thus: "This is a kind of comprehensive soliloquy, absorbing into its substance by the speaker's keenly observant glance the surrounding scenery and audience; bringing all that is pertinent to the chosen moment by the channels of memory, argument, curiosity and association; adding through the deep-graven lines which habit has incised upon character, which the soul would fain conceal, or is even unconscious of the necessity for concealing; and enriching the current of self-revealing speech with the product of any other emotion which may have been powerful enough to share in the fashioning of the critical moment."

Referring to Browning's dramatic monologues, Hugh Walker has observed: "These collections form together one of the most precious and profoundly original contributions to the poetic literature of the nineteenth century. Browning did not invent the dramatic monologue, but he made it specially his own, and no one else has ever put such rich and varied material into it. The defects which prevented his complete success in the regular drama are not apparent cognate form. He takes just what interests him, and consequently he is nearly always inspired, nearly always at his best. The style, indeed, is invariably his own, and does not change with the character as it should; but under such conditions the fact matters little."

Giving an estimate of Browning's dramatic monologues, Routh has observed in *Towards the Twentieth Century*: "A man of Browning's

energy and resolution would not rest till he had found a method to expound his philosophy in all its relation to human beings at least to his own satisfaction. By the time he published *Men and Women* in 1855, he had learnt how to test his philosophy in the battle of life. With *Dramatis Personae* (1864) his ideas found the one artistic form which makes them real.

"This presentment was, of course, the dramatic monologue. It may be objected that Browning had been practising nothing else since he put his pen to paper, and that in any case the type of poem was familiar to readers of Wordsworth, Byron and Tennyson. But neither they nor he had realised the possibilities of the *genre*. A drama must represent a conflict; if a monologue, a conflict of thought. Upto the middle of the nineteenth century it had represented a conflict between what the speaker wished and what he knew others wished; that is to say, between a desire and an external conflict. Thus the monologue had to serve as a monodrama. But why should it not represent a conflict of which the speaker was unconscious and about which even the reader would be in two minds—a monologue which made you hesitate between God's view and man's view. Such was the most seignificant conflict, according to Browning's mature philosophy.

"It was in this discovery that the poet realised his peculiar genius and fulfilled the idea projected in *Paracelsus*. He had all along believed that God moved through human beings, vitalising each personality. Filled with this optimism he had studied the mental habits of his fellow creatures with an almost holy interest, and like all lovers of his kind he loved their idiosyncrasies. But this fascinating investigation by no means revealed an unimpeded stream of divine influence. On the contrary, it looked as if God's presence was strangely at a disadvantage in many people's temperaments and dispositions. Such was the disconcerting evidence, and the character in question seemed quite unconscious of any conflict or two-sidedness. So Browning set himself to examine and explain why and when divine urge was—not suppressed—but concealed. To elucidate the paradox, he had to dramatise the types of mind which are disenguous (not frank), complex, mixed with base metal.

"Such is the unique Browningesque monologue. His first achievement in the new style are *Blougran* and *Cleon* in *Men and Women* (1855). In his earlier efforts his characters are presented either as wholly bad, for instance the speakers in *My Last Duchees* and *Spanish*

Cloister ; or men like Paracelsus who slowly and painfully rise to perfection but are always aiming at it ; or men who are wholly good even if misunderstood, like Lippi, the Patriot, or David (in *Saul*). But from the mid-century onwards he begins also to develop an eye for the characters that are both good and at the same time who seem to disappoint the creator's purpose, to take in hand their own development and quite conscientiously turn it to their own lower purposes. He did not abate one jot of his confidence in the divine omnipresence, but as he was so versed in following that individual influence, he had often traced to the individual's brain and observed that it sometimes stopped short or lost effectiveness in that temperamental and man-controlled mechanism. But the obstruction was not due to the powers of evil—it was doubtful if there were any such powers – but to a trick of understanding, a distorted habit of mind, an obliquity which might one day be straightened by some shock or flash of intuition. To demonstrate this conviction, he started afresh to probe men's minds, to follow up their trains of thought, to track their prejudices in consequences and obsessions. Hence his later monologues become not obscure but tortuous, and labyrinthine. Occasionally they are difficult because he sometimes found his most promising material among archaic characters, whose thoughts were complicated by the jumble of old notions, quite foreign to the modern mind."

3. **Browning's Optimism.** In his outlook on life Browning was an incorrigible optimist. He looked with scorn at the pessimistic school of poetry growing up all around him, and the decadents, with their belief that art was only a counting of autumn leaves. Once he declared : "Death, death, it is the harping on death that I despise so much. In fiction, in poetry, French as well as English, and I am told in American also, in art and literature, the shadow of death, call it what you will, despair, negation, indifference is upon us. But what fools who talk thus. You know as well as I, that death is life, just as our daily momentarily dying body is none-the-less alive, and ever recruiting new forces of existence. Without death, which is our church-yard crape-like word for change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life. Never say I am dead."

Where Tennyson is doubtful about the ultimate good as the goal of life :

> Oh, yet we trust that *somehow* good
> Will be the final goal of ill,
> To pangs of nature, sin of will,
> Defects of doubts, and taints of blood.
>
> (*In Memoriam*)

Browning is sure that all is for the best :

> How good is man's life, the mere living, how fit to employ
> All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy.
> I have lived, seen god's thro'a life time, and all was for best.
>
> (*Saul*)

In *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, he says :

> Perfect I call thy plan :
> Thanks that I was a man.

And in the magnificent poem *Abt Volger* he says :—

> There shall never be one lost good ! What was shall live as before;
> The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
> What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more,
> On the earth the broken arc; in heaven, a perfect round.

In *Rabbi Ben Ezra* Browning's healthy optimism is well exhibited in touching lines :

> What I aspired to be,
> And was not, comforts me.

There are lives which succeed, though to outward seeming they may be miserable failures. It is the aspiration which makes the man, as he tells us over and over again, nowhere more grandly than in *Saul* :

> 'Tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man would do.

Our proper sphere is ever indicated by the direction and intensity of our aspirations and strivings. As plants in mines, that never see the sun, tend upwards towards the light, so the inner aim shows the true man :

> Better have failed in the high aim as I,
> Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed.

he says in the *Inn Album*. The same truth is emphasised in *Fifine at the Fair*

> I gather heart through just such conquests of the soul,
> Through evolution out of that which, on the whole
> Was rough, ungainly, partial accomplishment, at best.

The world is very hard upon failures, and seldom gives credit even for the working, however good, of the sum which does not come out right. But happily God does not judge after this manner :

> All men strive, and who succeeds ?
> What hand and brain rest ever paired ?

What heart alike conceived and dared ?
What act proved all its thought had been ?
What will but felt the fleshly screen.

(*The Last Ride Together*)

We have the same idea in another form in the concluding lines of *A Grammarian's Funeral* :

That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundreds soon hit :
The high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.

For Browning our body and this earth are equally important as our soul and heaven. Thus he says :

In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.

The first necessity of a man's soul is a 'body at its best', and the proper use of this life, which is good :

How good to live and learn
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best.

(*The Last Ride Together*)

And after this life, there is another life awaiting him, still more glorious. So death does not fill him with despair. He regards earthly life as a mere stage in a journey—a training ground and pupil's place—his grief is small at the leaving of it. 'I count', he says

Life is just a stuff
To try the soul's strength on, educe the man.

(*In a Balcony*)

So take and use thy work :
Amend what laws may lurk.
What strains the stuff, what warpings past the aim !
My times be in thy hand !
Perfect the cup as planned,
Let age approve of youth and death complete the same.

(*Rabbi Ben Ezra*)

4. **Browning as the Poet of Love.** Browning is one of the greatest poets of love in English literature, but his treatment of love is original. Unlike most of the love poets, he is a realist who does not employ ideal imagery, but makes use of the grotesque in order to express sublime emotions. His love poetry does not talk about raptures and ideals and gates of heaven, but about commonplace things of everyday use. It does not deal with abstractions, but awakens in

every man the memories of that immortal instant when common and dead things had a tremendous meaning. Browning never forgets the little details which to a man who has really loved, may suddenly send an arrow through the heart. For example, in *A Lover's Quarrel*, the lover gives every detail of the dress his beloved is wearing :

See, how she looks now, dressed,
In a sledging cap and vest,
'Tis a huge fur cloak —
Like a reindeer's yoke
Falls the lappet along the breast :
Sleeves for her arm to rest,
Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

In another way Browning's love poetry differs from the usual love poetry. The theme of unrequited love has probably produced more effusion of sickly sentiment than any other subject, but Browning treats the subject in a way that is at once novel and admirable. There is no talk among his lovers of 'blighted hearts', no whining and weeping, no contemptible professions of contempt for the woman who has had the ill-taste to refuse some conceited lover, but a noble manly resignation, a profound and still grateful sorrow which has not much in it of reproach, no love of disloyalty, and no pretence of despair. For example, in *Christina*, Christina's lover has but 'changed eyes' with her; but no queenly scorn of hers can undo the spiritual transformation which her glance wrought :

Her soul's mine; and thus, grown perfect,
I shall pass my life's remainder.

The really tragic love-story was for Browning, not the story of love rejected, but of love flagging, fading or crushed out.

Never fear, but there's provision
Of the devil's to quench knowledge
Lest on earth we walk in rapture.

This is how Christina's lover bitterly reflected. The lover in *The Last Ride Together* refuses to confess his failure in love, and is full of hope for its fulfilment :

What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We fixed so, ever should abide ?
What if we still ride on, we two ?
What life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,

The instant made eternity.—
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride ?

In *Evelyn Hope*, the lover stands by the death-bed of a young girl whom he has loved, unknown to her. She has died, and never known his love. But what does that matter ? God creates love to reward love and there is another life to come :

So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep.
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand.
There, that is our secret : go to sleep
You will wake, remember, and understand.

In *A Woman's Last Word*, the woman, in a pathetic situation, resolves to merge her individuality in the wish and will of her husband, to bind, for his sake, her intellect in the chains of her heart :

Be a god and hold me
With a charm !
Be a man and fold me
Within thy arm !
Teach me, only teach, Love
As I ought;
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought.

A careful study of Browning's love-poems reveals the fact that Browning has his own conception of Love, which is the basis of his poems. He considers love as the quality by which man touches the infinite, the quality common to God and man. Love for him is the philosophic principle which harmonises and unifies all beings ; at the same time the creative cause, and the sustaining and perfecting power. It is also the moral ideal; the end towards which man strives to advance :

O world, as God has made it, all is beauty,
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.

If Joy was the root of life, according to Browning, Love was the most intimate, intense, and marvellous of all vital energies, towards which it converged. In Love, as Browning understood it, all those elementary joys of his found satisfaction.

(*iii*) **ARNOLD**

(1822—1888)

Another great poet of the early Victorian period is **Matthew Arnold,** though he is not so great as Tennyson and Browning. Unlike

Tennyson and Browning who came under the influence of Romantic poets, Arnold, though a great admirer of Wordsworth, reacted against the ornate and fluent Romanticism of Shelley and Keats. He strove to set up a neo-classical ideal as against the Romantic. He gave emphasis on "correctness' in poetry, which meant a scheme of literature whicks picks and chooses according to standards, precedents and systems, as against one which gives preference to an abundant stream of original music and representation. Besides being a poet, Arnold was a great critic of poetry, perhaps the greatest critic during the Victorian period, and he belongs to that rare category of the critic who is a great poet also.

Though Arnold's poetry does not possess the merit of the poetry of Tennyson and Browning, yet, when it is at its best, it has a wonderful charm. This is especially the case with his early poetry when his thought and style had not become stereotyped. Among his early poems the sonnet on Shakespeare deserves the highest place. It is the most magnificent epigraph and introduction to the works of Shakespeare. Another poem of great charm and beauty is *Requiescat* which is an exquisite dirge. In his longer poems—*Strayed Reveller*, *Empodocles on Etna*, *Sohrab and Rustum*, *The Scholar Gipsy*, *Thyrsis* (an elegy on Clough, which is considered of the same rank as Milton's *Lycidas* and *Shelley's Adonais*)—it is the lyrical strain into which the poet breaks now and then, which gives them a peculiar charm. It is the same lyrical note in the poems—*The Forsaken Merman*, which is a piece of exquisite and strained but melodious, passionate music ; *Dover Beach* which gives expression to Arnold's peculiar religious attitude in an age of doubt ; the *Memorial Verses*—which immediately appeal to the reader.

Most of the poetry of Arnold's gives expression to the conflict of the age—between spontaneity and discipline, emotion and reason, faith and scepticism. Being distressed by the unfaith, disintegration, complexity and melancholy of his times, Arnold longed for primitive faith, wholeness, simplicity and happiness. This melancholy note is present throughout his poetry. Even in his nature poems, though he was influenced by the 'healing power' of Wordsworth, in his sterner moods he looks upon Nature as a cosmic force indifferent to, or as a lawless and insiduous foe of, man's integrity. In his most characteristic poem, *Empedocles on Etna*, Arnold deals with the life of a philosopher who is driven to suicide because he cannot achieve unity and wholeness ; his sceptical intellect has dried up the springs of simple, natural feeling. His attitude to life is very much in contrast

with the positive optimism of Browning whose Ben Ezra grows old on the belief that 'The best is yet to be'.

As a critic Arnold wants poetry to be plain, direct and severe. Though poetry is an art which must give aesthetic pleasure, according to Arnold, it is also a criticism of life. He looks for 'high seriousness' in poetry, which means the combination of the finest art with the fullest and deepest insight, such as is found in the poetry of Homer, Dante and Shakespeare. Arnold's own poetry was greatly affected by his critical theories, and we find that whereas Tennyson's poetry ornate and Browning's grotesques, Arnold's poetry on the whole is plain and prosaic. In setting forth his spiritual troubles Arnold seeks first of all to achieve a true and adequate statement, devoid of all non-essential decorations. The reader gets the impression that the writing is neither inspired nor spontaneous. It is the result of intellectual effort and hard labour. But there are occasions in the course of his otherwise prosaic poems, when Arnold suddenly rises from the ground of analysis and diagnosis into sensuous emotions and intuition, and then language, imagery, and rhythm fuse into something which has an incomparable charm and beauty.

Following are the main characteristics of Arnold's poetry :—

1. **The Melancholy Note in Arnold's Poetry.** Arnold is habitually melancholy in his poetry. This note was predominant in his poetry from the very beginning of his poetic career. In his two prize poems as a student, *Alaric at Rome and Cromwell,* Arnold indulged in melancholy musings. In *Alaric* he drew the melancholy picture of doomed Rome thus :

> Hast thou not marked on a wild autumn day
> When the wind slumbereth in a sudden lull,
> What deathlike stillness o'er the landscape lay,
> How calmly sad, how sadly beautiful ;
> How each bright tint of tree, and flower, and health
> Were mingling with the seer and withered hues of death.

This melancholy note continued throughout in the poetry of Arnold. *Dover Beach* is a profoundly melancholy poem, expressing the peculiar turn of Arnold's mind, at once religious and sceptical, philosophical and emotional. The second part of it deserves to be quoted as a fine example of his melancholy temper :

> The Sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd ;

But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another ! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, no help for pain ;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarm of struggle and fight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

In the "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" there occur the following most pathetic lines which express Arnold's melancholy temper :

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn,
Their faith, my tears, the world deride—
I come to shed them at your side;
Oh hide me in your gloom profound,
Ye seldom seats of holy pain !
Take me cowl'd forms, and fence we round,
Till I possess my soul again ;
Till free my thoughts before me roll,
Not chafed by hourly false control.

Scholar Gipsy also sounds a deep note of melancholy. There the poet says :

For early didst thou leave the world, with powers
Fresh, undiverted to the world without,
Firm to their mark, not spent on other things ;
Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,
Which much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings.
O life unlike ours !
Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,
And each half lives a hundred different lives.
Who wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope.

In his love poems which are associated with his relations with Marguerite, Arnold is melancholy. Her indifference brings home to him, sharply and dramatically, what he believes to be the emotional situation of the modern man—his insufficiency, and uncertainty. At times he feels the indifference as a betrayal and a humiliation, and

thus he speaks of it in "To Marguerite", comparing his own constancy to her fickleness :

In the void air towards thee
My strained arms are cast
But a sea rolls between us—
Our different past

To the lips, oh ! of others,
Those lips have been prest,
And others, ere I was.
Were clasp'd to that breast.

Arnold's youth was full of bitterness and disappointment as is clear from Marguerite poems, and he did not expect any relief in old age. Thus he says in the poem "Growing Old"

It is to find long days
And not once feel that we are ever young.
It is to add, immured
In the hot prison of the present, month
To month with weary pain.

It is to suffer this,
And feel but half, and feebly, what we feel.
Deep in our hidden heart
Festers the dull remembrance of a change,
But no emotion—none.

In "Mycerinus "Arnold deals with the theme of youth stricken down with its cosmological implications, and in "Balder Dead" he laments the passing of spring and the gods with a more immediate and passing emotion. In *Sohrab and Rustum* Arnold makes the same helpless plaint. Homer's idea that this life is hell broods over the poem ; it is the pathos of the young man who is doomed to early death, which is the recurrent theme of the poem :

Unwillingly the spirit fled away,
Regretting the warm mansion which it left,
And youth and bloom, and this delightful world.

2. **Arnold as an Elegiac Poet.** Arnold is the greatest elegiac poet in English language. His elegiac temper pervades his poetry from beginning to end, and it is perhaps this, rather than the exaltation of the early lyrics, or the deep harmony of *Sohrah and Rustum*, which seems to the modern reader his peculiar characteristic. Referring to the elegiac quality of Arnold's poetry, and its contrast with his gay and playful manners as exhibited in his prose, Garrod has observed in *Poetry and the Criticism of Life* : "If I had to define Arnold's place in poetry, I should be disposed to say of him, quite

simply, that he is the greatest elegiac poet in our language, not in virtue merely of *Thyrsis*, but in virtue of the whole temper of his Muse. His genius was essentially elegiac. Out of what experience came this dominant elegiac quality, it is not easy to know. His poetry, profoundly melancholy, runs from the world, runs from it, as I think, hurt, hurt in some vital part. It believes itself able to sustain life only in the shade...... His best poetry stands deliberately aside from the world ; that it should be so conceived to be a condition of his life. The contrast between the superficial life of everyday and the buried self of the soul is dominant in his poetry to the degree of tyranny."

Referring to the elegiac element in the poetry of Arnold, Hugh Walker has observed in *The Literature of the Victorian Era* : "Nothing in Arnold's verse is more interesting than its elegiac element. It is too much to say that there is no other English poet in whom the elegiac spirit reigns as it does in him ; perhaps he who approaches nearest to him in this respect is William Watson. Other great poets —Milton, Gray, Shelley, Tennyson—have given grand expression to their sorrow in single elegies ; but no one returns so frequently as Arnold to the elegiac form. He found in the elegy the outlet of his native melancholy of the 'Virgilian cry' over the mournfulness of moral destiny. It is the natural tone of an agnostic who is not jubilant, but regretful of the vanished faith,—regretful of its beauty, and regretful of the lost promise.

"Not only are Arnold's elegies numerous, they are almost invariably among his finest work. And always his spirit is that of Gray rather than of Milton or Shelley or Tennyson. Arnold's elegies have never the triumphant and inspiring ring of Milton's or Shelley's. But as little are they elegies of the individual. The subject of *Rugby Chapel* is his own father ; in *A Southern Night* it is his brother ; in *Westminster Abbey* and in *Thyrsis*, his most intimate friends ; but even in these instances of keen personal sorrow the poet widens his view and treats of human destiny as much as Gray does in the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. And precisely the same spirit inspires poems which are not elegiac in the sense of being laments for individual men. *Thyrsis*, the poem on Clough, is scarcely more elegiac in spirit than *The Scholar Gipsy*. In both the real theme is the condition of modern life, its feverishness, its 'sick hurry', and its 'divided aims.' It is also in the 'Oberman' poems, the *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*, the *Stanzas from Carnac*, *Heine's Grave* and *Memorial Verses*. In all there is the same stateliness of

utterance, and the same calmly sad undertone. They are the voice of a spirit almost crushed beneath the burden of life. Hence Arnold's grave rebuke in verse of the materialistic spirit, his plea for gentleness and quiet as against bustling energy, 'trenchant force, and will like a dividing spear'. It is this which attracts him to the monastic life, and wrings from him a momentary cry for shelter in the cloister:

> Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,
> Ye solemn seats of holy pain!
> Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round,
> Till I possess my soul again.

This is the favourite phrase, to 'possess his soul' and the chief fault the poet finds with his countrymen is that we

> See all sights from pole to pole,
> And glance and nod and bustle by,
> And never once possess our soul
> Before we die.

The lesson he himself draws from the world is Resignations. Nature herself teaches it:

> Yet, Fausta, the mute turf we tread,
> The solemn hills round us spread,
> This stream which falls incessantly,
> The strange scrawl'd rocks, the lonely sky,
> If I might lend their life a voice,
> Seem to hear rather than rejoice.

(*iii*) Some Minor Poets

Besides Tennyson, Browning and Arnold there were a number of minor poets during the early Victorian period. Of these **Mrs. Browning** and **Clough** are well known.

Elizabeth Barret (1806-61) became Mrs. Browning in 1846. Before her marriage she had won fame by writing poems about the Middle Ages in imitation of Coleridge. She also gave voice to sensitive pity in *Cowper's grave* and to passionate indignation in *The Cry of Children* which is an eloquent protest against the employment of children in factories. But she produced her best work after she came in contact with Browning. Her *Sonnets from the Portugese*, which were written before her marriage with Browning, tell in a most delicate and tender manner her deep love for, and passionate gratitude to Browning who brought her, who was sick and lonely, back to health and life. The rigid limit of the sonnet form helped her to keep the

exuberance of her passion under the discipline of art. Her other great work, *Aurora Leigh* (1857), is written in the form of an epic on a romantic theme. Written in blank verse which is of unequal quality, the poem is full of long stretches of dry, uninteresting verse, but here and there it contains passages of rare beauty, where sentiment and style are alike admirable.

Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861), a friend of Arnold, came under the influence of Wordsworth in his early years, but later he cut himself off from Wordsworthian narrow piety, and moved towards a religious faith free from all dogmas. He searched for a moral law which was in consonance with the intellectual development of the age. In his *Dipsychus*, 'the double-souled' (1850), he attempted to reconcile the sceptical and the idealistic tendencies of the soul. His best known work, however, is *The Bothie of Toberna Vuolich*, in which he has given a lively account of an excursion of Oxford students in the Highlands. Here he, like Wordsworth, emphasises the spiritualising and purifying power of Nature. The importance of Clough as a poet lies mainly in the quality of his thought and the frank nobility of his character which are beautifully expressed in the following memorable lines :

> It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishment the scroll :
> I am the master of my fate,
> I am the captain of my soul.

CHAPTER X

LATER VICTORIAN POETS

(*a*) **Pre-Raphaelite Poets.** In the later Victorian period a movement took place in English poetry, which resembled something like a new Romantic Revival. It was called the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and was dominated by a new set of poets—**Rossetti**, **Swinburne** and **Morris**, who were interested simply in beauty. They were quite satisfied with the beauty of diction, beauty of rhythm, and the beauty of imagery in poetry. They were not interested in the contemporary movements of thought which formed the substance of Arnold's poetry, and had influenced Tennyson a good deal. They made use of the legends of the Middle Ages not as a vehicle for moral teaching or as allegories of modern life, as Tennyson had done, but simply as stories, the intrinsic beauty of which was their sufficient justification. There was no conscious theory underlying their work as there was in the case of Arnold's poetry.

It was in 1847 that a young artist, named Holman Hunt, came under the influence of Ruskin's first volume of *Modern Painters*. He along with his friends, Millais and D. G. Rossetti, who were also painters, determined to found a club or brotherhood which should be styled pre-Raphaelite, and whose members should bind themselves to study Nature attentively with the object of expressing genuine ideas in an unconventional manner, in sympathy with what was 'direct and serious and heart-felt' in early Italian painting before the artificial style of Raphael. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood lasted for a very short time, but its effect upon the plastic arts was far-reaching and revolutionary. D.G. Rossetti who was a painter as well as poet, introduced these principles in the field of poetry also. As early as 1848, in his twentieth year, Rossetti began to write the sonnets long afterwards collected as *The House of Life*, in the opening of which he urged the poets not to be satisfied with a repetition of the worn-out forms of current literature, but to turn back to the earliest masters:

> Unto the lights of great-past, new-lit
> Fair for the Future's track.

Rossetti displayed in those earlier pieces the passion for material beauty, and the love of rich language, magnificent even in simplicity, which were always to characterise his poetry. He also showed a complete detachment from ethical curiosity, from that desire to mend the world which occupied almost all his Victorian contemporaries, and was to obsess his successors. Being a painter he was able to express his poetic genius more exclusively concentrated on the hues and forms of phenomena, than any other English poet. He withdrew poetry from its wide world, and concentrated it on the intensity of passion, and the richness of light on an isolated object. His earliest volume of *Poems* (1870), which spread thrills of aesthetic excitement far and wide, attracted a number of young enthusiasts, in spite of some faint protests by the older generation against the 'Fleshly School' of English poetry. Other poets who followed him and belong to the pre-Raphaelite group of poets are—**Christiana Rossetti, William Morris,** and **Swinburne.**

The Pre-Raphaelite school of poetry did not regard poetry as being prophetic, or as being mainly philosophical. Their poetry did not concern itself with intellectual complications after the manner of Browning and Arnold. It was not an intellectual movement at all, but it brought back the idea that poetry deals with modes of thought and feeling that cannot be expressed in prose. Moreover, it gave greater importance to personal feeling over thought. It also introduced symbolism which was so rare in English poetry, and insisted on simplicity of expression and directness of sensation. The fleshly images used by the Pre-Raphaelite poets were full of mysticism, but the Victorians who considered them as merely sensuous were shocked by them.

(*i*) ROSSETTI

(1822—1882)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the chief force behind the pre-Raphaelite movement. He was the son of Gabriel Rossetti, an Italian refugee, who was a poet himself and a man of sterling character. D.G. Rossetti studied drawing, and as a young man became one of the most enthusiastic members of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was at the middle of the century to convert England from conventional art. His own form of painting never admitted reconciliation with convention, and possessed far greater charm than that of the other members of pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—Millais and Holman Hunt. Though his drawings were severely criticised, no one

with eyes could doubt the magnificence of his colour. The same pictorial quality became the chief characteristic of his poetry, which lies apart from the main current of contemporary verse, both in its highly specialised quality of thought and language and in the condition and circumstances of its production. Rossetti openly followed the profession of a painter, pursuing poetry, for the most part, as a recreative rather than a principal study.

In his poetry Rossetti assumes for ever the reality and immanence of spiritual and moral world. But he is not a consciously didactic poet. On the other hand, the form and substance of his utterance are so perfected in truth and virility of thought, in majesty and grace of speech, that the reader is unconsciously affected by them. Rossetti's poetry can be roughly divided into two groups—the personal and the impersonal poems. In the *House of Life* sonnets, *Dante at Verona*, *The Streams Secret*, *The Portrait*, and many of the shorter lyrics, the personal note of love or grief, of memory or hope, is wholly dominant. In the second group, in the great romantic ballads, in *Rose Mary* and *The Blessed Damozel*, in *The White Ship* and *The King's Tragedy*, in *The Bride's Pleasure* and *Sister Helen*, the imagination takes a higher and larger range.

Rossetti was a supreme master of rhythm and music. He cost his great historical eyes in the highest narrative—that is to say, the ballad form; and chose the sonnet—the most chastened and exclusive vehicle for the meditative, and yet sensuous, self-delineative love poetry. But whether written in the form of ballad or sonnet, Rossetti's verse remains fully charged with the very essence of romance. As a poet, he is neither less nor more pre-Raphaelite than a painter. The vivid and intense simplicity of his diction, the verbal flashes of his ballad style, seem to correspond with the tone and method of his water-colour painting, and the more laboured splendour of the sonnets with the qualities of his oil paintings.

Rossetti stands alone among the poets of his time, and he was the leader in the process of breathing up a dominant tradition of Victorian poetry. Referring to this Prof. Ifor Evans has observed in *Later Nineteenth Century Poetry*: "In the period (1847-54) Rossetti disentangled his poetry from its prescribed Victorian duties of expounding the idea of the time; he released it from its obligations to investigate the conditions of moral or spiritual consciousness. This he achieved naturally, almost secretly, as if he were unaware of his own purposes. He never had to revolt against his century because

he was never in it; spiritually he existed not in an age of scientific discovery with an emphasis on 'the condition of the people,' but in a world of his own which had the *decor* of Dante's Italy. Seldom does he choose a contemporary theme; in 1849 he wrote a series of discursive poems describing his journey to Paris and Belgium, but these were, with one exception, not published with his permission. In 1852 he was led for some unexplained reason to write an ode on *Wellington's Funeral.* But his characteristic poetry is marked by a withdrawal from contemporary problems and circumstances. It can be seen in *The Burden of Nineveh*, where he shows how distasteful and unreal was the modern world in which by an unkind accident of time he found his physical existence:

In our Museum gallaries
To-day I lingered o'er the prize
Dead Greece vouchsafes to living eyes,—
Her Art for ever in fresh wise
    From hour to hour rejoicing me.
Sighing I turned at last to win
    Once more the London dirt and din;
    And as I made the swing-door spin
    And issued, they were hoisting in
    A winged beast from Nineveh.

And the same approach is continued later in the poem:

Now, thou poor god, within this hall
Where the blank windows blind the wall
From pedestal to pedestal.
The kind of light shall on thee fall
    Which London takes the day to be

While school foundations in the act
Of holiday, three files compact,
Shall learn to view thee as a fact
Connected with that zealous tract:
    Rome-Babylon and Nineveh.

"In withdrawing to his own world, he felt no antagonism to religious belief, as Shelley and Swinburne had done. One may trace an autobiographical sentiment in the lines in *The Bride's Prelude*:

'But though I loved not holy things,
    To hear them scorned brought pain—
They were my childhood.

His mind delighted in the rich symbolism of Catholic ritual and employs it without believing in the faith which it represents. He used it as he would have used any other material whose form and

suggestion attracted him....Swinburne summarised Rossetti's approach to Christianity when he wrote: 'Rossetti has felt and given the mere physical charm of Christianity with no admixture of doctrine or of doubt."

Giving an estimate of Rossetti's poetry Esther Wood has observed in *Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement*: "The poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti lies apart from the main current of contemporary verse, both in its highly specialised quality of thought and language, and in the conditions and circumstances of its production. In as much as he followed openly, the profession of a painter, pursuing poetry, for the most part, as a recreative rather than a principal study (though never with less seriousness than his accepted vocation) and publishing his first volume of original poems in his forty-second year, he is exempted to some extent from the standards of criticism applied to him whose creative energies are concentrated in the field of literature. Whether Rossetti's genius, as he himself believed, found its highest and most perfect embodiment in poetry rather than in painting—whether the essential qualities of his art will be more evident to posterity in the volume of his collected poems than in his pictures—is still an open question. It may, however, he admitted that his mastery of the verbal medium was almost always more complete, his discipline in metrical structure more thorough and his natural habit of diction more facile, than any skill he attained in brush and pencil. To estimate his final influence upon contemporary thought in the one realm as against the other is yet more difficult than to assess the relative merit of his actual work in either sphere; so intimately was the poet incarnate in the painter; so largely did the painter's vision inspire and dominate his poetry.

"But it would be a poor analysis that should divide too finely the interwoven threads of a radiant and many-coloured genius. In an age of intellectual re-birth, of artistic and social revolution, the re-adjustment of forces and functions in the ethical and aesthetical realms is apt to produce a strange complexity of talent, not always beneficial to a single art, not always well for the diversely endowed artist, but often leading to the unification of many activities into one effective stream of purpose, moved by the impulse that infused that nation with a Time-Spirit potent for immortal things. Such a combination of talent in single personalities, in a period of rare national fertility in scholarship and creative power, reveals at the same time the basic unity of aesthetic life and its inseparable interdependence with the moral ideal. Michaelanglo, at the zenith of the Italian Renaissance

standing at the parting of the ways, gathered up, as it seemed, the several arts into his representative genius, and left to the land that was soon to swamp the aesthetic spirit in the mire of a materialistic decadence the three-fold heritage of his painting, his sculpture, and his song. Rossetti at the zenith of the English Renaissance, draws a two-fold inspiration from the struggle of the modern world, and left the double dower of painting and of poetry, to urge the coming generation to the higher issues of fine art, or to stand the witness of rejected ideals to ages recalcitrant (obstinate) to the vision and the impulse of to-day.

"For the first greatness of Rossetti's poetry is that it assumes for ever the reality and the immanence of a spiritual—and more—a moral world. Not be that ever misuses the vehicles of art as tools of philosophy, or stoops to a didactic application of aesthetic truth. But his art is all moral (as Mr. Ruskin would put it) because it is all fine art. And the moral purpose of art is the better secured when art is trusted to effect that purpose in its own way. The consciously didactic poet is less sure to mould the will and character of a people, than the form and substance of whose utterance are so perfected in truth and virility of truth, in majesty and grace of speech, as to be a fit oblation to his own ideal. Not 'how can I best teach others and influence them aright ?" but 'how can I best express the highest thing I know and feel ?' is self-expressive, self-revealing to the very heart's core. The ultimate test of poetry is not 'what did this man intend to teach us' ? but 'of what sort is the manhood here revealed ? what are the visions by which it lived ? what the ideals in which it grew ? is such a soul's experience wide, deep, typical, and profitable to the rest of mankind ?'

"In applying such a test to the writing of Rossetti, it is necessary to distinguish between what may be roughly termed the 'personal' and the 'impersonal' poems. In the one class, supremely exemplified by the *House of Life* sonnets, *The Portrait*, and many other shorter lyrics, the personal note of love or grief, of memory or hope, is wholly dominant: the poet's soul is absorbed with its individual being, and sees in all life around him the illustration and interpretation of his own. In the other class, in the great romantic ballads, in *Rose Mary* and *The Blessed Damozel*, in *The White Ship* and *The King's Tragedy*, in *The Bride's Pleasure* and *Sister Helen*, the imagination takes a higher and a larger range ; the one soul interprets others, waiting not to be interpreted. The art becomes impersonal in this sense only—that the thought of self is merged in the full and immense life of humanity,

laying hold of the universal consciousness through its own intuitive experience ; the heart beats with the world's heart, shares its eternal struggles, contributes to its eternal growth ; and the spirit knows itself one fragment of an infinite whole. In such a sphere the art remains the more vitally personal, in that the poet brings the mysteries of existence, the abiding problems and realities of the conscious world, to the touchstone, as it were, of his own spirit, and submits himself thereby to the more crucial test,—of how he can interpret humanity to man, and make more clear the knowledge, more possible the realisation of his highest ideals...

"The poetry of Rossetti, modern as it is in its passionate grasp of human interests, its deep insight into present and perpetual things, links itself nevertheless to an English past ; takes up, as it were, the dropped threads of Elizabethan glory ; reinspires the circling breath of life which passed round Europe in the fifteenth century, kindling England from the fires of reawakened Italy in the golden age of song. It has already been pointed out by one of Rossetti's biographers that 'the malign influence over our literature in post-Shakespearean times has been French.' It was reserved for a second Renaissance heralded by Chatterton and Blake, led by Shelley, Keats and Coleridge, and culminated by Dante Rossetti, to take us back to the broad simplicity and dignity of Shakespeare's England.

"Our reiteration, therefore, of the term 'Pre-Raphaelite' in approaching Rossetti's work as a poet, leads us to expect not mysticism merely, but ascertain robust sensuousness, as of Pagan origin, in his interpretation of life and destiny. The romantic temper in its highest manifestations, absorbing and transfiguring, rather than conflicting with, the classic ideals, implies more than receptivity to newer beauty and truth. It has a moral basis and an intellectual range ; it apprehends the spiritual world as something closely bound up with familiar things ; it finds the human soul striving for expression through material forms ; it recognises the divine possibilities of individual and social life, the force and responsibility of personal character, and the solmnity of the choice between good and evil daily made by man."

CHRISTIANA ROSSETTI

(1830—94)

Though Christiana Rossetti naturally displayed a temperament akin to her brother's, and sometimes undoubtedly wrote to

some extent under his inspiration, large parts, and some of the best parts, of her poetical accomplishments, are quite distinct from anything of his. Her sonnet sequences have the same Italian form and the same characteristics of colour, music, and meditation, as those of Rossetti, because the sonnet form exercised its strong restraint. But her lyrics have a higher, more bird-like movement and voice than the stately lyrics of Rossetti. Her range was distinctly wide. She had, unlike Mrs. Browning, and unlike the majority of her sex, a very distinct sense of humour. Moreover, her pathos has never been surpassed except in the great single strokes of Shakespeare. But her most characteristic strain is where this pathos blends with or passes into, the utterance of religious awe, unstained and unweakened by fear. The great devotional poets of the seventeenth century, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert, are more artificial than she is in their expression of this.

Christiana Rossetti began with *Goblin Market and other Poems* in 1861, followed it with another volume, *The Prince's Progress* in 1866 and after a much longer interval with *A Pageant and Other Poems* in 1881. Later her verse was collected more than once and it was supplemented by a posthumous volume after her death. But a good deal of it remains in two books of devotion, entitled *Time Flies* (1885) and *The Face of the Deep*.

MORRIS

(1834—96)

William Morris who was an eminent designer and decorator besides being a poet, was chiefly interested in the Middle Ages. His first volume of poems—*The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858)—gives expression to his enthusiasm for the Middle Ages. His object of writing poetry was to revive the true Gothic spirit, and these poems interpreted ardours and mysteries of the Middle Ages which the Victorians had forgotten. Though Tennyson also drew inspiration for his 'Idylls' from medieval sources, he used madieval stories as a vehicle for contemporary moralising. Morris, on the other hand, tried to bring back to life the true spirit of the Middle Ages.

For nine years after *The Defence of Guenevere*, Morris did not write anything, as Rossetti under whose influence he had come, wanted him to be a painter. When he did resume his literary work,

his style had entirely changed. *The Life and Death of Jason* is the first of a long series of narrative poems which forms the bulk of his contribution to literature. In it he followed Chaucer whom he knew and loved best. In 1867-70 were published the greatest collection of his stories in *Earthly Paradise*. These stories which are in Medieval setting, are written in an easy and simple style, and their diction is always graceful and suited to the subject.

In the later part of *Earthly Paradise* there is an indication of a change in Morris's interests and methods. Tales such as the 'Lover of Gudrun' which are derived from the mythologies of northern Europe are treated in a different manner. This new interest was intensified by his visits to Iceland in1871 and 1873, and the greater part of Morris's subsequent work is based on the study of the sagas, and has a spirit of Epic poetry. He translated the 'Grettis and Volsunga' Sagas ; but the new spirit is found at its best in the poem *Sigured the Volsung*.

Morris is a pre-Raphaelite in the sense that he wrote poetry mainly with the object of creating beauty. He is past master in producing languorous effects bathed in an atmosphere of serenity and majesty. He, therefore, belongs to the lineage of Spenser in combining virile strength with the greatest refinement of touch. His poems have a harmonious and musical flow, the variety and suppleness of which recall at once the styles of Chaucer and Spenser. In whatever form he writes—blank verse, rhymed verse, the complicated or the simple stanza—he can produce exquisite music which casts its fascinating spell on the readers. In all his poetry, the love of adventure, the attraction of an imaginary world, where beautiful human lives bloom out in open nature and unrestricted liberty, where happiness, suffering and death have themselves a dignity unknown in the real world made ugly by industrialisation, inspired Morris. The charm of his poems lies mainly in their indefiniteness and their remote atmosphere which soothe the aching of a mind disturbed and tortured by the tyranny of a vulgar present. His poetry is the result of a reaction of a wounded sensibility against the sordidness and ugliness of the real world.

SWINBURNE

(1837—1909)

Besides Rossetti and Morris, **Alegernon Charles Swinburne** was another Victorian poet who is reckoned with the pre-Raphae-

lites, though his association with them was personal rather than literary, and he belonged to the later styles of the movement. Unlike the other members of the group, Swinburne was a musician rather than a painter. The poetry of Rossetti and Morris, however musical it may be, is primarily pictorial. Swinburne's poetry lacks the firm contours and sure outlines of the poetry of Rossetti and Morris, but it has the sonority of the rhymes which link the verses together. From his youth Swinburne displayed an extraordinary skill in versification and a gift of imitating widely different rhythms, not only those of English poets, but also those of the Latin, the Greek, and the French. It is in fact in the music of verse that Swinburne is pre-eminent. When once asked at an Oxford gathering, which English poet had the best ear, he answered : "Shakespeare, without doubt ; then Milton ; then Shelley ; then, I do not know what other people would do, but I should put myself". This claim, though made in all simplicity is quite justified, and there is no doubt that Swinburne is one of the great masters in metrical technique. He handled the familiar forms of verse with such freedom that he revealed their latent melody for the first time.

Swinburne's poetry deals with the great romantic themes—like Shelley's revolt against society, the hatred of kings and priests and the struggle against conventional morality. He was also inspired by the French romantics, Victor Hugo and Baudelaire. The appearance of his *Poems and Ballads* in 1866 created great excitement. The Victorians who had accepted Tennyson as the great poet of the age resented the audacity of the upstart who, though possessing high technical skill, cared nothing for restraint and dignity. Arnold found many of his lines meaningless, and called him "a young pseudo-Shelley". Serious persons were perturbed by his downright heterodoxy. His violent paganism was the first far-heard signal of revolt that was to become general till a generation later. The young, however, were carried away by the passion of his verse, his intoxicating rhythms, and the new prospects of beauty which seemed to be opening in English poetry.

Swinburne first became known by his *Atlanta in Calydon* (1865), a poetic drama, distinguished by some great choruses, especially the one that opens, '*Before the beginning of the year*'. Swinburne was essentially lyrical even when he attempted drama, and the success of *Atlanta in Calydon* was due to the choral passages possessing great lyrical quality. Dramatic movement and the creation of characters

were outside Swinburne's range. He wrote other dramas—*Bothwell* (1874) and *Mary Stuart* (1881) both on a period of history in which he was passionately interested. But, above all, Swinburne is a lyrical poet, and he never surpassed or equalled the *Poems and Ballads* (1886). In his later poems—*Laus Veneris, The Garden of Proserpine, The Hymn of Proserpine, The Triumph in Time, Llylus and Dolores,* there is a repetition of images and ideas already familiar. These songs of love were succeeded by poems dedicated to national liberty, especially that of Italy, for Swinburne was an ardent admirer of Mazzini. In *A Song of Itlay* (1867) and *Songs before Sunrise* (1871) he gave lyrical expression to his passion for freedom. Two other volumes of *Poems and Ballads* appeared in 1878 and 1889. His later poems—*Studies in Song* (1880), *A Century of Roundels* (1883) and *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882) show more of metrical skill than lyrical power.

Though much of Swinburne's poetry, especially that of his later years, seems unsubstantial and almost empty of meaning, he is not merely a technician in verse. His love of liberty, hatred of tyranny in all forms, and voluptuous paganism were quite genuine impulses which inspired much of his poetry. At his best, when he sings in *Hertha* of the birth and destiny of man, on one can deny him the title of a great poet.

Giving an estimate of Swinburne as a poet, Lafcadio Hearn has observed in *Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets* : "A good modern critic has said that the resemblance between Shelley and Swinburne is of so astonishing a kind that it tempts one to believe that Swinburne is Shelley in new body, that the soul of the drowned poet really came back to life again, and returned to finish at Oxford University the studies interrupted by his expulsion at the beginning of the century. The fancy is pretty ; and it is supported by a number of queer analogies. Swinburne, like Shelley, is well born ; like Shelley, he has been from his early day at Eton a furious radical ; like Shelley, he has always also been an enemy of conventions and prejudices of every description. At the beginning of the century Swinburne could certainly have been treated just as Byron and Shelley were treated but times are changed to-day ; the public has become more generous and more sensible, and critics generally recognise Swinburne as the greatest verse-writer English literature produced.

"If Swinburne were Shelley reborn we should have to recognise that he gained a good deal of wisdom from the experience of his former life. He is altogether an incomparably stronger character

than Shelley. He kept his radicalism for his poetry, and never in any manner outraged the conventions of society in such matters as might relate to his private life. He is also a far greater poet than Rossetti, greater than Browning, greater than any other Englishman, not excepting Milton in the mastery of verse. He is also probably one of the greatest of scholars among the poets of any country, writing poetry in English or French, in Greek and Latin. For learning, there are certainly few among the poets of England, who would not have been obliged to bow before him.

"I may have surprised you by saying that Swinburne is the greatest of all our poets. But understand that I am speaking of poetry as distinguished from prose, of poetry as rhythm and rhyme, as melody and measure. By greatest of poets I mean the greatest master of verse. If you were to ask me whether Swinburne has as great a quality as Tennyson or as Rossetti or as Browning, either in the moral or philosophical sense, I should say no. Greatest of all in the knowledge and use of higher emotional, moral, sympathetic, and philosophical qualities that give poetry its charm for those who know nothing about the art of words. And of all the Victorian poets, Swinburne will be the least useful to students of these literary expressions which are especially the outcome of classical study. Swinburne's scholarship is one of the great obstacles to his being understood by any who are not scholars themselves in the very same direction ; in this sense he would be, I think, quite as useless to you as Milton in the matter of form. In value to you he would be far below Milton in the matter of thought and sentiment.

"There are several ways of studying poetry. The greater number of people who buy the books of poets, and who find pleasure in them, do not know anything about the rules of verse. Out of one hundred thousand Englishmen who read Tennyson, I doubt very much if one thousand know the worth of his art. English University students, who have taken a literary course probably do understand very well ; but a poet's reputation and fortune are not made by scholars, but by the great mass of half-educated people. They read for sentiment, for emotion, for imagination ; and they are quite satisfied with the pleasure given by them by the poet in this way. They are improving and educating themselves when they read him, and for this it is not necessary that they should know the methods of his work, but only that they should know its results. The educators of the great mass of any people in Europe are, in this sense, the poets.

"The other way of studying a poet is the scholarly way, the critical method (I do not mean the philosophical method ; that is beside our subject) ; we read a poet closely, carefully, observing every new and unfamiliar word, every beautiful phrase and unaccustomed term, every device of rhythm or rhyme, sound or colour that he has to give us. Our capacity to study any poet in this way depends a good deal upon literary habit and upon educational opportunity. By the first method I doubt whether you could find much in Swinburne. He is like Shelley, often without substance of any kind. By the second method we can do a great deal with a choice text from his best work. I think it better to state this clearly before hand, so that you may not be disappointed failing to find in him the beautiful haunting thoughts that you find in Rossetti or in Tennyson or in Browning".

(*b*) The Decadent or Aesthetic Movement

The Pre-Raphaelite Movement in English poetry was followed by Decadent or Aesthetic Movement, though it is not so well defined. In the later part of the nineteenth century (1890—1900) there was a tendency among the literary artists to lay a greater emphasis on the idea of Art for Art's sake. They were obviously influenced by Walter Pater and the French authors like Baudelaire and Verlaine, who tried to break with conventional values. They believed that all themes must be excluded from poetry except the record of the few deeply moving movements of passion or sadness of emotional exaltation or distress. They sought themes from pleasures which the virtuous forbid, and inflicted agonies upon themselves to achieve perfection of form. These they conveyed for their own sake with exquisite brevity. They found this conception not only in the study of French models but in the critical works of Walter Pater, and their adherence to these self-imposed limitations separates them from earlier English romanticisms and from pre-Raphaelite verse. Swinburne had already been subjected to similar influences, but he had wider interests—enthusiasm for medieval legends, for Elizabethan drama and his love of liberty and hatred for tyranny. The Decadents, on the other hand, were not interested in any great subject, theme or idea. They showed anxiety about the right word and were fussy about vowel and consonant patterns. Moreover they emphasised the passion rather than the intellect. Pater, in his essay on the Pre-Raphaelites, and above all in his *Conclusions to Studies in the Renaissance*, had given a double suggestion which greatly affected this group of poets. First, there accompanies life an inevitable mortality, "The undefinable

taint of death is upon all things"; and, secondly, "out of life may be seized some few moments of deep passion or high intellectual endeavour." The poets belonging to the Aesthetic Movement attempted to express in a most beautiful manner such evanescent moods of pleasure and pain for their own sake without any extraneous motive of conveying any moral. In fact they were pitted against all conventional morality and rebelled against established social and moral laws. They knew neither philosophy nor religion, but were the worshippers of beauty for its own sake. T eir object was to afford to the readers merely aesthetic pleasure.

(i) Oscar Wilde (1856—1900)

Oscar Wilde was the first to come under the influence of Walter Pater. Though in his early poems he had dealt with religious and spiritual experiences, in *New Helen* he declared himself as the votary of beauty.

> Of heaven or hell I have no thought or fear
> Seeing I know no other god but thee.

In *The Garden of Eros* he reaffirmed his belief that the pursuit of beauty is the only desirable form of human activity. Like the pre-Raphaelites he also pointed out that modern civilisation opposes this ideal :

> Spirit of beauty, tarry yet awhile
> Although the cheating merchants of the mart
> With iron rods profane our lovely isle,
> And break on whirling wheels the limbs of art.

In the short poem, *Panthea*, Wilde almost gives a paraphrase of Pater's aesthetic creed :

> Nay, let us walk from fire to fire,
> From passionate pain to deadlier delight.
> I am too young to live without desire,
> Too young art thou to waste this summer night
> Asking those idle questions which of old
> Man sought to see and oracle made no reply.

(ii) Ernest Dowson (1867—1900)

Earnest Dowson symbolises in his work the Aesthetic Movement of the eighteen ninetees. He came under the influence of Rossetti, Swinburne and the French romanticists who believed in the doctrine of Art for Art's sake. Following Pater's artistic principles he recorded in his poetry moments of sensations to the utter exclu-

sion of all moral and philosophical comment. He dealt mainly with the theme of brevity of life and the fading of things that once were beautiful :

> They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,
> Love and desire and hate;
> I think they have no portions in us after we pass the gate.

Dowson possessed a love of words for their very shape and appearance on the page, apart from their values of sound and association. He also possessed an unusual prosodic skill. His *Cynara* holds a pre-eminent place in his work mainly on account of the sweet melody of its verse. His central poetic theme is most profoundly treated in *Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration* knowing that the 'world is wild and passionate; and that the rose of the world would fade', the poet views with sad admiration those whose asceticism allows them to stand aside and make their nights and days, 'Into a long returning rosary' :

> Calm, sad, secure; behind high convent walls,
> These watch the sacred lamp, these watch and pray,
> And it is one with them when evening falls,
> And one with them the cold return of day.

(*iii*) **Lionel Pigot Johnson** (1867—1902)

Lionel Johnson was an associate of Oscar Wilde and Dowson who created the aesthetic poetry of the eighteen ninetees. Though he was greatly influenced by old Christianity and wrote a good deal of religious verse, yet along with passages of religious enthusiasm can be found paragraphs marked by aestheticism.

(*iv*) **Arthur Symons** (1865—1945)

Next to Dowson the most consistent follower of the Aesthetic Movement was Arthur Symons. Though he did not possess the unfaltering artistic perfection of Dowson's poetry where the images burn clearly and steadily, yet his poetic range was wider, and he was a great critic.

(*c*) **Other Important Poets.**

Other important poets of the Later Victorian Period were **Patmore, Meredith** and **Hardy,** though the last two are better known as novelists.

Coventry Patmore (1823—1896) was a pre-Raphaelite in the sense that he believed in 'the simplicity of art' theory, but much

of his poetry expresses his own individuality rather than any literary or aesthetic doctrine. His most popular poem is *The Angel in the House* which contains some very fine things. His great Odes covered by the title *The Unknown Eros* convey in beautiful, controlled free verse, the mysticism of love combined with an intense religious feeling as no other poems in the English language do.

Though **George Meredith** (*1829—1900*) was associated with Rossetti and Swinburne, as a poet he had nothing in common with the pre-Raphaelite group except his belief that art should not be the handmaid of morality. He looked upon life as glorious, increasingly exciting and always worthwhile. The tremendous vigour and metrical skill of his long lyrics—*The Lark Ascending* and *Love in the Valley* remind one of Swinburne. His greatest poetical work, *Modern Love*, written in sonnets of sixteen lines, is a novel in verse, and is of its own kind in English literature. It is no doubt the most successful long poem written during the later Victorian period.

Thomas Hardy (1840—1928), though a novelist, expressed himself, like Meredith, in verse also. His greatest work, *The Dynasts*, is written in the form of an epic in which the immense Napoleonic struggle unrolls itself as drama, novel, tragedy, and comedy. In his verse sometimes he is as prosaic as Wordsworth in his later poetry, but at times he produces a highly dazzling and penetrating effect. In some of his poems like 'Only a man harrowing clods' he gives expression to his pessimistic philosophy, but in others he gives a true picture of human experience with a queer sense of super reality. *Moments of Vision*, the title of one of his volumes, is an apt description of his poems as a whole, because most of them give us visions of emotional moments charged with the inheritance of past ages of emotions, combined with irrational, half-conscious feelings which are recognised by the contemplative mind as being part of every-day experience.

CHAPTER XI

THE MODERN POETS

Modern poetry, of which T.S. Eliot is the chief representative, has followed entirely a different tradition from the Romantic and Victorian traditions of poetry. Every age has certain ideas about poetry, especially regarding the essentially poetical subjects, the poetical materials and the poetical modes. The preconceptions about poetry during the ninteenth century were mainly those which were established by great Romantic poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. According to them the sublime and the pathetic were the two chief nerves of all genuine poetry. That is why, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton were given a higher place as poets than Dryden and Pope, who were merely men of wit and good sense, and had nothing of the transcendentally sublime or pathetic about them. During the Victorian Age, Matthew Arnold, summing up these very assumptions about poetry, stated :

> "Though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose.
>
> "The difference between genuine poetry and the poetry of Dryden and Pope and all their school is briefly this : their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits; genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul."

Arnold shared with the age the prejudice in favour of poetry which in Milton's phrase was "simple, sensuous and passionate". It was generally assumed that poetry must be the direct expression of the simple, exalted, poignant sympathetic emotions. Wit, play of intellect and verbal jugglery were considered as hindrances which prevented the readers from being "moved".

Besides these preconceptions, a study of the nineteenth century poetry reveals the fact that its main characteristic was preoccupation with a dream world, as we find in Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* and Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*. O' Shaughnessy's following lines express the popular conception of the poet during the nineteenth century :

We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by the lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams ;
World-losers and world-forsakers
On whom the pale moon shines.

Such conceptions of the poet and his art prevailed during the Victorian period not because they were right, but because they suited the age, and moreover they had the prestige of the Romantic achievement behind them. But they could not find favour with the poets and critics of the twentieth century on account of the radical changes that had taken place. Under the stress and strain of new conditions they could not take the dream habit seriously. Though during the Victorian period Tennyson was aware of the new problems which were creeping in on account of scientific and technical discoveries, yet under the impact of the popular conception of poetry, and also because of his own lack of intellectual vigour, he expressed in his poems more of a spirit of withdrawal and escape, rather than of facing squarely the problems confronting his age. This is illustrated by his *The Palace of Art*. The explicit moral of the poem is that an escape from worldly problems ; but instead of effectively conveying the moral, the poem stands for withdrawal and escape. In the songs of Swinburne about Liberty and Revolution we do not find the preciseness and genuineness of Shelley's ideals.

The Victorian poetry was obviously other-worldly. Its cause was stated by Arnold when he referred to

......this strange disease of modern life
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts.

(*A Summer Night*)

But in spite of the fact that Arnold among all the Victorian poets was the most frank in his expression of the 'disease' of his age his response to it was not fundamentally unlike that of other poets of his age. For him the past was out of date, the future was not yet born, and not much could be done. He studied Wordsworth and the Greek poets mainly with the purpose of escaping to the freshness of the early world. In his own poems like *A Summer Night*, where he refers to the disease of modern life, he slips away from 'this uncongenial place, this human life' into the beautiful moonlit region and forgets the iron time in the midst of melodious sentiments.

Arnold, therefore, was not qualified to give a new direction to poetry. Browning, on the other hand, though a greater poet, was unaware of the disharmonies of his time. He was too optimistic to face the realities of life and new problems which had crept in. He was a poet of simple emotions and sentiments, and though he could understand psychologically the past ages, he had no aptitude to understand the complexities of modern life. He was also, therefore, not in a position to provide the impulse to bring back poetry to the proper and adequate grappling with the new problems which had arisen.

William Morris, though a practical socialist, reserved poetry for his day-dreams. Moreover, some of the distinguished authors like Meredith and Hardy turned to the novel, and during the early part of the twentieth century it was left to the minor poets like Houseman and Rupert Brooke to write in the poetic medium. Thus there was the greatest need for some great poets to make poetry adequate to modern life. For generations owing to the reaction of aesthetes against the new scientific, industrial and largely materialistic world, the people in England had become accustomed to the idea that certain things are 'not poetical', that a poet can mention a rose and not the steam engine, that poetry is an escape from life and not an attack on life, and that a poet is sensitive to only certain beautiful aspects of life, and not the whole life. So the twentieth century needed poets who were fully alive to what was happening around them, and who had the courage and technique to express it.

The great poetical problem in the beginning of the twentieth century was, therefore, to invent a technique that would be adequate to the ways of feeling, or modes of experience of the modern adult sensitive mind. The importance of **T. S. Eliot** lies in the fact that, gifted with a mind of rare distinction, he has solved his own problem as a poet. Moreover, being a poet as well as a critic his poetical theories are re-inforced by his poetry, and thus he has exerted a tremendous influence on modern poetry. It is mainly due to him that all serious modern poets and critics have realised that English poetry must develop along some other line than that running from the Romantics to Tennyson, Swinburne and Rupert Brooke.

Of the other important poets of the twentieth century **Robert Bridges** belonged to the transitional period. He was an expert literary technician, and it was his "inexhaustible satisfaction of

form" which led him to poetry. His metrical innovations were directed to the breaking of the domination of the syllabic system of versification, overruling it by a stress prosody wherein natural speech rhythms should find their proper values. He was convinced that it was only through the revival of the principle of quantitative stress that any advances in English versification could be expected. **A. E. Houseman**, a classical scholar like Robert Bridges, rejected the ecstasies of romantic poetry, and in his expression of the mood of philosophic despair, used a style characterised by purity, simplicity, restraint and absence of all ornamentation. **W.B. Yeats**, the founder of the Celtic movement in poetry and drama, a phase of romanticism which had not been much exploited hitherto, gave expression to the intellectual mood of his age.

The twentieth century poets who were in revolt against Victorianism and especially against the didactic tendency of poets like Tennyson, Browning and Arnold, and even Swinburne and Meredith, felt that the poet's business was to be uniquely himself, and to project his personality through the medium of his art. Poetry to them was not a medium for philosophy and other extraneous matters ; nor was it singing for its own sake. It was a method first of discovering one's self, and then a means of projecting this discovery. Thus the problem before each of them was how to arrive at a completely individual expression of oneself in poetry. Naturally it could not be solved by using the common or universally accepted language ofpoetry. On account of the change in the conceptions of the function of poetry, it was essential that a new technique of communicating meaning be discovered. It was this necessity which brought about the movements known as imagism and symbolism in modern poetry.

Symbolism was first started in France in the nineteenth century. The business of the symbolist poet is to express his individual sensations and perceptions in language which seems best adapted to convey his essential quality without caring for the conventional metres and sentence structures. He aims at inducing certain states of mind in the reader rather than communicating logical meaning. The imagists, on the other hand, aim at clarity of expression through hard, accurate and definite images. They believe that it is not the elaborate similes of Milton or extended metaphors of Shakespeare, which can express the soul of poetry. This purpose of poetry can be best served by images which by their rapid impingement on the consciousness, set up in the mind fleeting complexes of thought and

feeling. In poetry which is capable of capturing such instantaneous states of mind, there is no scope for Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity." In it suggestion plays the paramount part and there is no room for patient objective descriptions.

The symbolist poetry in England came into prominence with the appearance of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. But it had actually started right during the Victorian age, which is evident from the poetry of **Gerard Manley Hopkins** (1844-89), a Jesuit priest whose poems were published thirty years after his death. It was the poetry of Hopkins and T. S. Eliot, which exerted the greatest influence on English poetry between the two wars.

The technique of the symbolist is impressionistic and representational. In order to prevent any obstruction in the way of emotive suggestion by any direct statement of experience he gives a covering of obscurity to his meaning. There is also in symbolist poetry a strong element of charm or incantation woven by the music of words. Repetition is often resorted to by the symbolist poets as we find in Tennyson's The *Marriage of Geraint* :

> Forgetful of his promise to the king
> Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,
> Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,
> Forgetful of his glory and his name
> Forgetful of the princedom and its cares.

But the repetitive rhythms which the symbolists use have in them a hypnotic quality. They also recall the texture of dreams of the subconscious states of mind, and because of absence of punctuation they can express the continuous "stream of consciousness."

The symbolists also give more importance to the subjective vision of an object or situation rather than the object or situation itself. Moreover, unlike the Romantics who create beauty out of things which are conventionally beautiful, like natural objects, works of art etc., the symbolists find beauty in every detail of normal day-to-day life. Naturally to accomplish that and create beauty out of such prosaic material requires a higher quality of art and a more sensitive approach to life. Moreover, besides including all sorts of objects and situations in the poetical fold, the symbolist has broken the fresh grounds in language also. He considers that every word in the language has a potentiality for being used in poetry as well as in prose. For him the language of poetry is not different from that of prose. As he uses all sorts of words which

were never used in poetry by the Romantics, the symbolist has to invent a new prosody to accommodate such words as were banned previously from the domain of poetry. Thus the symbolist does not consider any particular topic, diction or rhythm specially privileged to be used in poetry.

1. ROBERT BRIDGES

(1840—1930)

Robert Bridges, though a twentieth century poet, may be considered as the last of the Great Victorians as he carried on the Victorian tradition. He is not a poet of modern crisis except for his metrical innovations. Belonging to the aristocracy his work is also concerned with the leisured and highly cultivated aristocratic class of society. In his poetry we find beautiful descriptions of English landscapes, clear streams, gardens, songs of birds. The world that he depicts is haunted by memories of the classics, of music and poetry and decorous love-making. He carries on the tradition of Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson, against which the young men of his times were in open revolt. We do not find in his poetry any bold attempt to face the critical problems facing his generation. Even his greatest poem, *The Testament of Beauty*, does not contain any consistent treatment of deep philosophy. That is why Yeats remarked that there is emptines everywhere in the poetry of Bridges.

The importance of Bridges in modern poetry, however, is in his metrical innovations. He was a lover of old English music and many of his early lyrics are obviously influenced by the Elizabethan lyricists, especially Thomas Campion. He was a remarkable prosodist, the first English poet who had a grasp of phonetic theory. He was a tireless experimenter in verse form. He himself admitted. "What led me to poetry was the inexhaustible satisfaction of form, the magic of speech, lying as it seemed to be in the masterly control of the material." Working under the influence of his friend, Hopkins, to whom he dedicated the second book of shorter poems, Bridges wrote his poems following the rules of new prosody. The best of Bridges' metrical experiment is the sprung rhythm, a kind of versification which is not, as usual, based on speech rhythm, but on "the hidden emotional pattern that makes poetry". And it was a definite contribution to the development of English verse.

The lyrics of Bridges like *A Passer By*, *London Snow*, *The Downs*, are marked by an Elizabethan simplicity. In the sonnets of *The*

Growth of Love, we find the calm, the meditative strain of Victorian love poetry. A believer in Platonic love, he exalts the ethical and intellectual principle of beauty. In his greatest poem, *The Testament of Beauty*, he has given beautiful expression to his love for 'The mighty abstract idea of beauty in all things" which he received from Keats. Here he has also sought to 'reconcile passion with peace and show desire at rest'. In his poetry Bridges thus transcended rather than solved the modern problems by his faith in idealism and the evolutionary spirit. He has no sympathy for the down-trodden and less fortunate members of humanity, and so whenever he deals with a simple human theme, as in the poem *The Villager*, he reflects the mind of the upper class which has lost touch with common humanity. Bridges is, therefore, rightly called the last Great Victorian, and his greatest poem, *The Testament of Beauty*, the final flower of Victorian spirit.

2. HOPKINS

(1844—1889)

Gerald Manley Hopkins who died in 1889, but whose poems were not issued during his lifetime, and who only became widely known after his friend Robert Bridges edited the collection in 1918, exerted a great influence on modern English poetry. The poems of Hopkins were so eccentric in style that Bridges dared not publish them till thirty years after his death. Hopkins had tried to revive the 'sprung rhythm', the accentual and alliterative measure of Langland and Skelton, which had dropped out of use since the sixteenth century. In this rhythm there are two currents, the under current and the over current, which are intertwined. This effect is produced by inducing the metre to run back on itself, sometimes making a second line reverse the movement of one before; sometimes in the same line confronting a metric foot by its opposite, for instance, an iambic followed by a trocher. As these variations produce the momentary effect of a break or split. Hopkins called this device *sprung rhythm.* The rhythm follows the system of beats and stresses unlike the quantitative metres where every syllable is counted. As in conversation we stress significant words and syllables with so much emphasis that accompanying syllables and words are left to take care ofthemselves, the 'sprung rhythm' is nearer to natural speech. That is why it has appealed to modern poets who in their poetry attempt to convey the everyday experience of modern life and its multifarious problems in a most natural manner. The 'sprung' rhythm of Hop-

kins, therefore, is his greatest contribution to modern poetry. Of course, he was not the first to invent it; there are examples of it in the poetry of all great poets, especially Milton. But Hopkins revived it and laid special emphasis on it, and exerted a great influence because the twentieth century needed it.

Hopkins, like Keats, was endowed with a highly sensuous temperament, but being a deeply religious man having an abiding faith in God, he refined this faculty and offered it to God. He avoided all outward and sensuous experience, but enjoyed them in a deeply religious mood as intimations of the Divine Presence. He could perceive God in every object, and tried to find its distinctive virtue of design or pattern or the inner kernel of its being, or its very soul which was expressed by its outer form. This peculiarity or the immanent quality in each thing which is the manifestation of Beauty was called by Hopkins as 'inscape', a term which he borrowed from Don Scotus. For example, the inscape of the flower called 'blue bell' is mixed strength and grace. Thus to him not only trees, grass, flower, but each human spirit had its personal inscape, a mystic creative force which shapes the mind. This 'inscape' Hopkins expressed in a style also which was peculiar to himself, because he could not be satisfied with the conventional rhythms and metres which were incapable of conveying what came straight from his heart.

The poems of Hopkins are about God, Nature and Man, and all of them are pervaded with the immanence of God. His greatest poem is *The Wreck of Deutschland*, which is full of storm and agony revealing the mystery of God's way to men. All his poetry is symbolic, but the majority of his poems are obscure. It is mainly on account of his theory—*sprung rhythm* and *inscape*—that he has exerted such a tremendous influence on modern poets.

3. A.E. HOUSEMAN

(1859—1936)

Alfred Edward Houseman was a great classical scholar. He wrote much of his poetry about Shorpshire, which like Hardy's Wessex, is a part of England, full of historic memories and still comparatively free from the taint of materialism. Out of his memories of this place, Houseman created a dream world, a type of arcadia. His most celebrated poem, *Shorpshire Lad*, which is a pseudo-pastoral fancy, deals with the life of the Shorpshire lad who lives a vigorous, care-free life.

Houseman was disgusted with the dismal picture which the modern world presented to him, but he did not possess a sufficiently acute intellect to solve its problems. However, in some of his poems he gives an effective and powerful expression to the division in the modern consciousness caused by the contrast between the development of the moral sense and the dehumanised world picture provided by scientific discoveries. In one of his poems based on his memories of Shorpshire he has achieved tragic dignity :

> Man loved unkindness then, but lightless in the quarry.
> I slept and saw not ; tears fell down, I did not mourn ;
> Sweat ran and blood sprang and I was never sorry ;
> Then it was well with me, in days ere I was born.

Houseman also wrote a few poems expressing the horrible destruction caused by modern wars, and their utter futility and inhumanity. But he was, on the whole, a minor poet who could not attain the stature of T.S. Eliot or W.B. Yeats.

4. The "Georgean Poets."

Besides Bridges and Houseman, who did not belong to any group, there was in the first quarter of the twentieth century a group of poets called the "Georgean Group." These poets flourished in the reign of George V (1911—1936). They possessed various characteristics and were not conscious of belonging to a particular group. In reality they were imitators of the past, who shut their eyes against the contemporary problems. But they were presumptuous enough to think of themselves as the heralds of a new age. Robert Graves who first claimed to belong to this group, and subsequently broke away with it, wrote about the Georgean poets : "The Georgeans' general recommendations were the discarding of archaic diction such as 'thee' and 'thou' and 'flower'd' and 'when'er,' and of poetical construction such as 'winter clear' and 'host on armed host' and of pomposities generally.. In reaction to Victorianism their verse should avoid all formally religious, philosophic or improving themes; and all sad, wrecked cafe-table themes, in reaction to the ninetees. Georgean poets were to be English but not aggressively imperialistic, pantheistic rather than atheistic ; and as simple as a child's reading book. Their subjects were to be Nature, love, leisure, old age, childhood, animals, sleep...unemotional subjects."

This is rather a severe account of the Georgean poets, but it is not wholly justified, though the quantity of work produced by the Georgean poets is great. The quality is not of a very high order.

The poets generally attributed to this group are roughly those whose work was published in the five volumes of *Georgean Poetry*, dated respectively 1911-12, 1913-15, 1916-17, 1918-19 and 1920-22. The important poets who contributed to these volumes were **Lascelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, Rupert Brooke, G.K. Chesterton, W.H. Davis ; Walter De La Mare, John Masefield, J.E. Flecker, W.W. Gibson, D.H. Lawrence, John Drinkwater, Sturge Moore, Laurence Binyon, Siegfried Sassoon** and **Wilfred Owen.**

Among these the poets whose work has some lasting value are **Walter De La Mare, W.H. Davis, Laurence Binyon** and **John Masefield.** The greatest of them is **Walter De La Mare** (1873—1957) who writes in a simple, pure, lyrical style about beautiful sights and sounds of the country, about children and old people, but there is always in his poetry a strange atmosphere produced by the apprehension of another world existing side by side with the everyday world. His poetry has the atmosphere of dreamland, as he himself says in his introduction to *Behold, This Dreamer* : "Every imaginative poem resembles in its outset and in its effect the experience of dreaming." He has the faculty of bridging the gulf between waking and dreaming, between reality and fantasy. Besides this he has great skill in the management of metre, and successfully welding the grotesque with the profoundly pathetic.

William Henry Davis (1871—1940) is one of the natural singers in the English language. Being immensely interested in Nature, the experience which he describes about natural objects and scenes are authentic. His lyrics remind us of the melodies of Herrick and Blake. Though living in the twentieth century, he remained wholly unsophisticated, and composing his poems without much conscious effort, he could not give them polish and finish. But in spite of this he has left quite a number of lyrics which on account of their lively music have an enduring appeal to sensitive ears.

Laurence Binyon (1869—1943), a scholar and poet who translated Dante into English had a sense of just word and its sound. Generally he wrote about classical themes. The most notable of such poems is his *Attila*,'a dramatic poem, which is a well-constructed play. Its vehement blank verse and speed of action remind the readers of Shakespeare. The First World War stirred him to profound feelings and he wrote some very moving poems, for example, the one beginning with the unforgettable line—

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old

The Second World War had a great saddening effect on him, and in his last years he wrote poems in which he contrasted old pleasures and dreams with the horrible war oppressed present. They were posthumously published in 1944 under the title *The Burning of the Leaves and other Poems*. Though these poems were written under the shadow of war and they deal with the transient nature of things and their tendency to decay, yet they express the hope, like Browning's poetry, that nothing that is past is ultimately gone.

John Masefield (born 1878) who has been Poet Laureate since 1930, has been composing poems for the last forty years, but he has not attained real greatness as a poet. As a young man he was a sailor, and so most of his early poetry deals with life at sea and the various adventures that one meets there. The poems which give expression to this experience are contained in the volumes *Salt Water Ballads* (1902) and *Ballads* (1906). In 1909 he produced his best poetic tragedy—*The Tragedy of Nan*. After that he gave up writing on imaginative themes, and produced poems dealing with the graver aspects of modern life in a realistic manner *e.g. The Everlasting Mercy* (1911), *The Widow in the Bye-Street Dauber* (1913), *The Daffodil Fields* (1913). All these poems narrate a stirring story with an excellent moral. Now he is looked upon as one of the 'prophets' of modern England.

5. The Imagists.

The first revolt against the Victorian Romantic poetic tradition came from a group of poets called the **Imagists.** Their activities extended for about ten years—from 1912 to 1922. They realised that the poetry of the Georgeans did not introduce any new vitality in English poetry. At its best it displayed both power and individuality, but it did not alter the fact that each of the Georgean poets was content to delimit or modify the poetic inheritance of the nineteenth century rather than abandon it in favour of a radically different approach. Neither Masefield, whose poetry is realistic in subject and vocabulary, nor De La Mare, who is the last of the true romantic poets of England, pointed to the new paths in English poetry.

The poetic revolution engineered by the Imagists, which began in the years immediately preceding the First World War, and which was both produced and further encouraged by T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, preferred the older tradition in English poetry to the Victorian Romantic tradition. The Romantic and the Victorian poets tried to express their personalities in their poems. For them poetry was a

means of self-expression and they appealed to the cultivated sensibility of their reader. They treated of themes dealing with their personal hopes and fears and often indulged in the emotions of nostalgia and self-pity. That is why the Victorian poetry especially had a tendency of running to elegy. The Imagists believed that the function of poetry is not self-expression, but the proper fusion of meaning is language. According to them poems are works of art and not pieces of emotional autobiography or rhetorical prophecy. As the purpose of poetry is the exploration of experience, the poet must strive after a kind of poetic statement, which is both precise and passionate, profoundly felt and desperately accurate, even if it means the twisting of the language into a new shape. There must be the fusion of thought and emotion, which is found among the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. The Imagists did not look upon the poet as the sweet singer whose function was to render in sweet verse and conventional imagery some personal emotions, but he was the explorer of experience. Therefore, he must use the language in order to build up the rich patterns of meaning, which required very close attention before they were communicated. The rebels were conscious of the fact that the poetry of their own time represented the final ebb of the Victorian Romantic tradition, and that the time was ripe to give a new direction to English poetry.

The new movement began with a revolt against every kind of sweet verbal impression and romantic egotism which persisted throughout the nineteenth century. Its originator, **T. E. Hulme,** who was killed in war in 1917, in an article which he wrote in 1909, declared his preference for precise and disciplined classicism to slophy romanticism. He advocated hardness and precision of imagery "in order to get the exact curve of the thing" together with subtler and more flexible rhythms. He with the help of **Ezra Pound**, who had come from America, founded the movement called **Imagism**. Defining the Imagists, Pound wrote in 1912 : "They are in opposition to the numerous and unassembled writers who busy themselves with dull and interminable effusions, and who seem to think that a man can write a good long poem before he learns to write a good short one, or even before he learns to produce a good single line." Giving a fuller statement of the aims of the Imagist movement, F. S. Flint pointed out in 1913 that three rules the Imagists observed wer e: (*a*) "direct treatment of the thing", (*b*) "to use absolutely no word that did not contribute to presentation", and (*c*) "to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome". Pound emphasised that

the Imagists should "use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something", and that they should avoid abstraction. The Imagist movement spread in England and America, and it was helped by the seventeenth century metaphysical poetry and the nineteenth century symbolists, who contributed their techniques and attitudes to the revolution.

The leader of the Imagists was **Ezra Pound.** Other poets who were included in the group were **F. S. Flint, Richard Aldington, F. M. Hueffer, James Joyce, Allan Upward, H. D.** (**Hilda Doolittle**), **Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams.** Instead of imitating the English romantics like the Georgeans, the Imagists attempted to reproduce the qualities of Ancient Greek and Chinese poetry. They aimed at hard, clear, brilliant effects instead of soft, dreamy vagueness of the English nineteenth century. Their aims which were expressed in the introduction to *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), can be summarised as follows :—

(1) To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.

(2) To produce poetry that is hard and clear, and not dealing in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous.

(3) To create new rhythms and not to copy old rhymes, which merely echo old ones.

The Imagists were greatly influenced by the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, which appeared in 1918, thirty years after the death of the poet. It was the complete absence of any sign of lackness in Hopkins' poetry, the clear signs of words and rhythms which were perfectly controlled by the poet to produce the desired effect, with no dependence at all on the general poetic feeling, which made an immediate appeal to the new poets.

Regarding the subject-matter of poetry, the Imagists, believing that there was no longer a general public of poetry lovers concentrated on expressing the modern consciousness for their own satisfaction and that of their friends. They gave up the old pretence that humanity was steadily progressing towards a millennium. Instead they recognised that in the new dark age of barbarism and vulgarity, it is the duty of the enlightened few to protect culture and escape the spiritual degradation of a commercialised world. This attitude seems to be similar to that of the aesthetes of the last decade of the nineteenth century, but it is not so. Whereas the aesthetes hating the vulgarity of the contempo-

rary world tried to lose themselves among beautiful fantasies by withdrawing into an ivory tower, the Imagists, on the contrary, faced the new problems and tried to create a very precise and concentrated expression, a new sort of consciousness because the traditional poetic techniques were inadequate for that purpose. Opposed to the romantic view of man as "an infinite reservoir of possibilities" they looked upon him as a very imperfect creature "intrinsically limited but disciplined by order". Unlike the romantics who regarded the world as a glorious place with which man was naturally in harmony, the Imagists regarded it "as landscape with occasional oasis...But mainly deserts of dirt, ash-pits of cosmos, grass on ashpits". They did believe in the words of Hulme, in "no universal ego, but a few definite persons gradually built up". In his Essay on *Romanticism and Classicism* he predicted that "a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming", and expressed the opinion that "there is an increasing proportion of people who simply can't stand Swinburne".

The Imagists could not adequately tackle the contemporary problems, because they lived too much among books, were rather irresponsible in their conduct, did not possess sharp intellect, and were not in close contact with actualities. The result is that their poetry is as nerveless and artificial as the neo-romantic poetry of the Georgeans. But they certainly deserve the credit of showing that English poetry needed a new technique, and that unnecessary rules and a burdensome mass of dead associations must be removed.

The poets belonging to the Imagist group did not produce great poetry on account of the reasons stated above. **Ezra Pound** is a poet of real originality but his too much and undigested learning which he tries to introduce in his poems, makes them difficult to understand, and also gives them an air of pedantry. His greatest contribution to modern poetry is his development of an unrhymed 'free verse', and other metrical emperiments which influenced T. S. Eliot.

The most important writer,. who in spite of his being not a regular member of their group, was directly connected with the Imagists was **David Herbert Lawrence** (1885—1930). He contributed both to Georgean poetry and the Imagist anthologies. Most of his mature poetry deals with the theme of duel of sex, a conflict of love and hate between man and wife, and expresses an annihilation of the ego and a sort of mystical rebirth or regeneration. His most remarkable poem *Manifesto* ends with a beautiful description of

universe where all human beings have completely realised their individualities, where

> All men detach themselves and become unique ;
> Every human being will then be like a flower, untrammelled,
> Every moment will be direct,
> Only to be will be such delight, we cover our faces when we think of it
> Lest our faces betray us to some untimely end.

The poems which he wrote in the last year of his life when he was dying of consumption, deal with the themes of death and eternity. Lawrence did a lot in rebuilding English poetry, and as a critic he set before the English poets an ideal, which has greatly influenced the modern English poets.

6. Trench Poets.

The First World War (1914-18) gave rise to war poetry, and the poets who wrote about the war and its horror especially in the trenches are called the war poets, or the "Trench Poets". The war poetry was in continuation of Georgean poetry, and displayed its major characteristics, namely, an escape from actuality. For example, E.W. Tennant describes the soldiers in *Home Thoughts in Laventine*, as

> Dancing with a measured step from wretched and shattered towns
> Away upon the Downs.

Instead of facing squarely the horrors of war, these poets looked upon the terrible present as a mere dream and the world of imagination the only reality. Following the Georgean tradition with its fanciful revolution from the drabness of urban life and its impressionistic description of the commonplace in a low emotional tone, a number of poets, who wrote about the war, described incidents of war and the ardours and pathos of simple men caught in the catastrophe. Their method was descriptive and impressionistic, and on account of lack of an intense, sincere and realistic approach, they failed to arouse the desired emotions in the readers.

Out of a number of these war poets, only two—**Siegfried Sassoon** and **Wilfred Owen**—attained some poetic standard. Though Sassoon in his early period belonged to the Georgean group, his predominant mood was not lyrical but satiric, not 'escapist' but rebellious, because he felt that the soldier was being sacrificed for a false idealism. He looked upon him as

> a decent chap
> Who did his work and hadn't much to say.
>
> (*A Working Party*)

In his *Suicide in Trenches* he described the horrors of Trench warfare. In *Song Books of the War* he dwelt on the short memory of the public who forget those who suffered and died for them during the war. Sassoon wrote some poems during the wars, in which he attacked the shallow complacency of his contemporaries, and gave voice to the disillusionment.

Wilfred Owen wrote war poems under the influence of Sassoon. He admired Sassoon because the latter expressed in a harsh manner the truth about war. Speaking about his own poetry he remarked, "Above all, I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is war and the poetry of war. The poetry is in the pity—all a poet can do today is to warn. That is why the true poets must he truthful." Though in his poems we find the mood of disillusioned irony, yet, unlike Sassoon, he does not completely lose his hope for man. His poems are free from bitterness and he rejoices in the exultation of battle as well as in the fellowship of comrades. Whereas in Sassoon's poetry we find a mood of indignation and satire, in Owen's poetry the mood is of reconciliation and elegy. The following remarkable lines in his poem *Strange Meeting* reveal Owen's typical approach to war.

> I am the enemy you killed, my friend...
> Let us sleep now.

As an experimenter in metre Owen's contribution to modern English poetry is great. Against the Georgean laxity he introduced accumulative use of balance and parallelism.

W. B. YEATS
(*1865—1939*)

William Butler Yeats was one of the most important of modern poets, who exerted a great influence on his contemporaries as well as his successors. He was an Irish, and could never reconcile himself to the English habits and way of thinking. By temperament he was a dreamer, a visionary, who fell under the spell of the folk-lore and the superstitions of the Irish peasantry. Like them he believed in fairies, gnomes, and demons, in the truth of dreams, and in personal immortality. Naturally, with such a type of temperament, Yeats felt himself a stranger in the world dominated by science, technology and rationalism.

Being convinced that modern civilization effaces our fundamental consciousness of ourselves, Yeats trusted in the faculty of imagination, and admired those ages when imagination reigned

supreme. Thus he went deeper and farther in the range of folk-lore and mythology. He discovered the primitive and perennial throb of life in passions and beliefs of ancient times, and he wanted to revive it, because he felt that modern civilisation has tamed it by its insistence on dry logic and cold reason.

Yeats was anti-rationalist. He believed in magic, occult influences and hypnotism. He thus led the "revolt of the soul against the intellect", in the hope to acquire "a more conscious exercise of the human faculties". He also believed in the magic of words, the phrases and terms which appeal to common humanity. Therefore, he tried to rediscover those symbols which had a popular appeal in ancient days, and which can even now touch man's hidden selves and awaken in him his deepest and oldest consciousness of love and death, or his impulse towards adventure and self-fulfilment. Being disillusioned by lack of harmony and strength in modern culture, he tried to revive the ancient spells and incantations to bring about unity and a spirit of integration in modern civilisation which was torn by conflicts and dissensions.

All these factors inclined Yeats towards symbolism. Believing in the existence of a universal 'great mind', and a 'great memory' which could be 'evoked by symbols', he came to regard that both imagery and rhythm can work as incantations to rouse universal emotions. He liked Shelley's poetry because of the symbolism inherent in the recurrent images of leaves, boats, stars, caves, the moon, He found that Blake invented his own symbols, but his own task was easier because he could draw freely on Irish mythology for the symbols he required. Coming under the influence of French symbolists like Verlaine, Macterlinck, he tried to substitute the wavering, meditative and organic rhythms as of a running man which are not suited to serious poetry.

As a symbolist poet Yeats's aim was to evoke a complex of emotions not by direct statement but by a multitude of indirect strokes. The result is that sometimes the symbols used by him are not clear as they have been derived from certain obscure sources. For example, the symbols used in the following lines from *The Poet Pleads with the Elemental Powers* demand a commentary :

> Do you not hear me calling white deer with no horns ?
> I have been changed to a hound with one red ear !
> I would that the Boar without bristles had come from the West.
> And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the sky
> And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to the rest.

In most of his poems, however, the symbols used by Yeats are obvious. One very common symbol in his poetry is 'the moon' which stands for life's mystery.

Yeats, therefore, tried to reform poetry not by breaking with the Past, but with the Present. According to him, the true poet is he who tells the most ancient story in a manner which applies to the people today. His early poems, like *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889), express Yeats's deepest idealism in the simple outlines of primitive tales. The same attempt, though more effective and mature, was made in *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) and *The Shadowy Waters* (1900). But up to this time Yeats had not found himself; he was groping in the dreamland of wisdom and illumination.

The First World War (1914-18) and the Irish disturbances during those eventful years gave to Yeats a more realistic direction. These conflicts, of course, did not completely efface his dreams, but they turned his eyes from mythology to his own soul which was divided between earthly passions and unearthly visions. Yeats realised that the highest type of poetry is produced by the fusion of both—"the synthesis of the *Self and Anti-self*" as he called it. The Anti-self is our soaring spirit which tries to rise above the bondage of our mental habits and associations. Yeats's lyrics which give the most effective expression to these views are *The Swan at Coole* (1917), *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair* (1929). Here he gave a very satisfying presentation of the wholeness of man—his *Self* and *Anti-self.*

In his later poetry Yeats reached a maturity of vision and style which may be described as hard, atheletic and having a metallic glint. Instead of serving as symbols and having certain indefinable associations, his last poems expressed 'Cold passion' in images which are chastened and well-defined. That is why, it is no exaggeration to say that Yeats was influenced by the Imagists, and influenced in them in return. *A Thought from Propertius* is in every respect an Imagist poem.

In his last years Yeats retired to the solitude of his own mind, and he wrote poems dealing with his early interests—love of dreams (*Presences*), admiration of simple joy of youth and old civilizations, but the disintegration of modern civilisation under the impact of war pained Yeats, and he believed that a revolutionary change is in the offing. In *Second Coming* he describes what lies at the root of the malady :

Things fall apart ; the centre cannot hold...
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

For about half a century Yeats exerted a tremendous influence on modern poetry on account of his utter sincerity and extraordinary personality and genius. He recognised no external law, but like a true and great artist, he was a law unto himself.

Giving an estimate of Yeats as a poet, Frazer has observed in *The Modern Writer and His World* : "Yeats was the last of the great romantics ; but because his life as a poet was so much longer than that of Keats or Shelley, and so much more complex and passionate and interesting than that of Wordsworth, it seems to me that there is a humanity, a solidity, a coherence, a constant awareness of the demands of decorum and style in his work, which are does not find in theirs. The body of his work is reasonably large and extends over something like fifty years of active continuous production, but I am not aware that in it one can put one's finger on more than half a dozen bad or false poems of which *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, ironically his most popular and his most widely known piece, is certainly one. The same thing cannot be said of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, of Shelley, or of Keats : indeed what one wants to preserve of, or what one comes back to again and again in these great romantic pioneers is rather a startingly small proportion of their total work.

"So, on the whole, I am ready to risk rashness, and to claim for Yeats the positions of a major English poet ranking with Donne, with Milton, and with Wordsworth in the great succession. I think he is very much *greater* than Browning or Tennyson or Arnold, and he has possibly more lasting qualities than poets like Pound or Eliot, who have for us today, with our particular problems, a more urgent topical appeal. One tests this sort of thing by personal experience : I bought Yeats's collected poems when I was in my teens, I carried them with me through my university days and through the war, I have them now ; and I find that I turn to them again and again for a kind of reassurance, a stimulation, a general keying up of my responses, which I can get from no contemporary source."

T .S. ELIOT

(1888—)

Thomas Stearns Eliot is the greatest among the modern English poets, and he has influenced modern poetry more than any

other poet of the twentieth century. He combines in himself strange and opposing characteristics. He is a great poet as well as a great critic; he is a traditionalist rooted in classicism as well as an innovator of a new style of poetry ; he is a stern realist acutely conscious of modern civilisation with its manifold problems as well as a visionary who looks at life beyond the limits of time and space.

T.S. Eliot was born in 1888 in the U.S.A. He was educated at Harvard University. After that he received education at Paris and Oxford, and settled in England which he has made his literary home. He came into prominence as a poet in the decade following the First World War *i.e.*, between 1920 and 1930, during which period he wrote the poems for which he is best known. There was at that time in England a tendency in favour of classicism which directly influenced Eliot. Being himself a great classical scholar, and finding around him petty poets of the Georgean group, he set himself to establish principles of a sound classicism. To him classicism stands for order. It is a tradition not established by the authority of Aristotle or any other ancient critic, but by the whole body of great writers who have contributed to it in the course of centuries. He conceives of literature as a continuous process in which present contains the past. The modern poet, according to Eliot, should carry on that process, follow the permanent spirit of that tradition, and thus create fresh literature by expressing the present on a new and modified manner. Thus Eliot is different from the neo-classicists of the eighteenth century, who insisted on implicitly following the narrowly defined rules of writing. To him classicism means a sort of training for order, poise and right reason. In order to achieve that the modern writer should not defy the permanent spirit of tradition, and must have "a framework of accepted and traditional ideas."

But the surprising thing about Eliot is that in spite of his being a professed classicist and an uncompromising upholder of tradition, he was the man who led the attack on the writing of "traditional" poetry, and came out as the foremost innovator of modern times. He thought that the literary language which had served its purpose in the past was not suited for modern use. So he rejected it outright. According to him, the modern writer, while carrying on the literary tradition of 'poise, order and right reason' need not follow the old and absolute idiom of his predecessors, but should invent entirely a new medium which is capable of digesting and expressing new objects and new feelings, new ideas, and new aspects of modern

life. The language used by the modern poet must be different from the language of the past because modern life dominated by science and technology is radically different from the life of the past ages characterised by slow and steady development.

In his attempt to find a new medium for poetry Eliot became interested in the experiments of Ezra Pound, the leader of the Imagists. Like Pound, Eliot sought to extend the range of poetic language by introducing words used in common speech but commonly regarded as inappropriate in literature. But Eliot is different from Pound in this respect that having a profound knowledge of classical literature he can, whenever he likes, borrow phrases from well-known poets and thus create an astonishing effect. Thus in his poems one finds colloquial words expressing precisely and exactly the meaning which he wants to convey, along with archaic and foreign words used by ancient poets, philosophers and prophets, which sound like voices far away beyond a mountain.

Eliot is acutely aware of the present and the baffling problems which face mankind in modern times. The poems of his early period as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917) express the disillusion, irony and disgust at the contemplation of the modern world which is trivial, sordid and empty. In his greatest poem, *The Waste Land*, the poet surveys the desolate scene of the world with a searching gaze. He relentlessly uncovers its baffling contrasts and looks in vain for a meaning where there is only

> A heap of broken images, where the sun heats,
> And the dread tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water.

The same attitude is expressed in the *Hollow Men* (1925) ! :—

> We are the hollow men,
> We are stuffed men,
> Leaving together,
> The Headpiece filled with straw.

But it is not merely the present with which Eliot is preoccupied. He is a mystic who has a profound sense of the past and he looks into the future. His aim is to look beyond the instant, pressing moment and think of himself as belonging to what was best in the past and may be prolonged in the future. For him the spirit exists in one eternal Now in which Past, Present and Future are blended. In order to experience it one should surrender one's ego and relax in a mood of humble receptivity. Only then one can absorb the

fleeting moment in such a way that the scheme of existence purged of all one's personal prejudices, narrowness and resentment is felt all around one's self. It is in this mood that his later poems published together in *Four Quartets,* consisting of *Burt Norton* (1936), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvage* (1941) and *Little Gidding* (1942) are written. In the last mentioned poem the poet lets his thoughts go free amid the ruined chapel at Little Gidding from which all recollection and conflict and effort have vanished, but where the intensity of spiritual prayer can still be felt.

Burt Norton begins with the significant lines :

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future
> And time future contained in time past.

Thus T.S. Eliot, who is a force in modern English literature, is a many-sided personality. He is a classicist, innovator, critic, poet, social philosopher and mystic—all combined into one. He makes the reader aware not merely of the problems of modern life but also of mankind as a whole. The soul of man finds itself in horror and loneliness in the Waste Land unless it is redeemed by courage and faith. Though a great and acute thinker, he has a spiritual approach to life, which is rare in the twentieth century dominated by science and materialism. And he has expressed his ideas and feelings in a language which is devoid of all superfluous ornamentation and is capable of conveying the bewildering and terrifying aspects of modern life. Of all the living English poets he has done most to make his age conscious of itself, and aware of the dangers inherent in modern civilisation.

Following are the main characteristics of T. S. Eliot as a poet :

1. **Eliot as a Classicist.** As a poet Eliot is a classicist and traditionalist. Referring to the classicism of Eliot, Maxwell has observed in *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot* : "A characteristic of classicism is its acceptance of an already existing poetic background, whose function is to provide the poem's incidental symbolism. *The Rape of the Lock* is conceived with its framework of the classical epic, using its accepted symbols—of the same nature is Eliot's acceptance of traditional literature as his poetic world. This can be seen most clearly in *The Waste Land,* where a blending of traditional European and Eastern thought is the necessary background to his interpretation of the contemporary problem. The basic symbolism is taken

from the Grail legend, and, particularly in the last section, Eliot introduces the journey symbol, which is a well-defined feature of European literature...

"No school of English poetry has so consistently based its art upon a satirical wit as the Augustan. With the decline of this school's power the astringent quality of its wit disappeared almost entirely from English verse. Eliot is the first to use it again to anything like the same extent, combining in his use the manner of Augustan wit with the purpose of metaphysical wit. The latter he has defined himself as levity intended to intensify the serious. Pope's astrophe to his Muse...

> Say what strange motive, Goddess could compel
> A well-bred lord to assault, a gentle belle,
> Oh say what stranger cause, yet unexplored,
> Could make a gentle belle reject a lord ?

is witty as these lines of Eliot are witty :

> I shall not want Capital in Heaven,
> For I shall meet Sir Alfred Mond,
> We two shall lie together lapt,
> In a five per cent Exchange Bond.

But Eliot's have purpose other than that of provoking amusement. They are part of his ironic reverie as his thoughts wander from the anecdotes of 'Pipits experience', and by contrast they intensify his regret for wrecked illusions, that is expressed later.

> But where is the penny world I bought
> To eat with pipit behind the screen ?
> The red-eyed scavengers are creeping
> From Kentish Town and Golden's Green.

(*A Cooking Egg*)

Although this wit is in manner the same as Pope's it is integrated with the different purpose of Eliot's poetry, and ceases to be an end in itself. That Eliot should think wit proper to poetry is, however, a result of his classical predilections.

Apart from the purpose of Eliot's wit, its existence in his poetry indicates a view of life rather similar to that of Pope who described man as 'The glory, jest, and riddle of the world'. Each has a certain casual irony, and Eliot's can be seen in those of his poems which are little more than light society verse. These are not intended to fulfil any deep purpose, although Eliot has spoken of his becoming accustomed to the habit of searching in these light verses for profundities that were certainly not part of the poet's

design. When Eliot is not looking at the world with a moralist's concern, he is inclined to adopt an attitude of ironical observation, which is basically a means of escape. It is this manner that he describes as Boston evening :

> Waking the appetites of life in some
> And to others bringing the "Boston Evening Transcript."

This deflationary wit is that of Pope, and here it is indulged in purely for its own sake. It is when his mind turns from the ultra-civilised New England society to the jarring contrast between past and the present of Europe that he begins to use his wit, practised in these early poems, as a more highly constituent of his poetry. Fundamentally, the connection between Pope and Eliot on this issue is a matter not at all of verbal reminiscence, but of similarity of outlook. A similarity that can be best distinguished in certain of Eliot's early poems, which are not disturbed by the moral issue that later became his concern. Even in his later poems, when his wit has a different emphasis, it remains a descendant of Augustan satirical bias.

Finally may be mentioned Eliot's preoccupations with the formal problems of poetry, his desire of verbal precision. This precision demands conscious choice and experiment rather than a transcription of subconscious dictation. Its ideal is phrasing.

> Where every word is at home
> Taking its place to support the others,
> The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
> An easy commerce of the old and the new,
> The common word exact without vulgarity,
> The formal word precise but not pedantic,
> The complete consort dancing together.

The emphasis is on exactness and precision which must not give the impression of stiffness. It is the same idea as Pope's

> True ease in writing comes from art, not chance
> As those move easiest who have learned to dance,

which employs the same image. The chief difference is that Eliot envisages a wider field of choice, for he admits 'the common word'. Thit is inevitable in view of his belief that poetry in his time demanded a closer connection with popular speech than has existed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries".

2. **Eliot's Poetic Technique.** As a poetic artist Eliot has developed his own technique which is in consonance with the spirit

of modern age. In the modern age of stark, bare, harsh actualities, his verse is also stark, irregular, bare, direct and divested of all ornamentation. Referring to this Mathiessen has observed in *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* : "Eliot knows that no experiment in art is valuable unless it is psychologically necessary, that no great innovator has cared for novelty for its own sake, but like Shakespeare, 'has been driven on step by step in his innovations, by an inner necessity, and that the novelty of form has been rather forced upon him by his material than deliberately sought.' This intimate inner necessity is bound up with the history of the age in which the poet lives, with its main movements of thought and of feeling. For, as Eliot has noted of Wordsworth's revolution in poetry, 'Any radical change in poetic form is likely to be symptom of some very much deeper change in society and in the individual.

"Such an approach leads to the reason for Eliot's own irregular verse. He knows that the main point about new poetry is always 'how disturbing it is to the conventional consciousness', that the shock tends to be 'by its syntax more than by its sentiments', and that, speaking strictly, versification 'is essentially a disturbance of the conventional language'. What fascinated him in the early seventeenth century poets was the 'constant evasion and recognition of regularity', the reliance on the iambic pentameter line and yet the continual skilful withdrawing from it. What strikes him as an essential quality in the most interesting verse, in this very hesitation between regularity and irregularity, in correspondence to a psychological perception of the precarious balance that constitutes life itself : 'It is this contrast between fixity and flux, this unperceived evasion of monotony which is the very life of verse'. The clamour for 'free verse' which was rising from some Imagists at the time when Eliot was beginning to write found in him its most penetrating critic. For he believed from the start that 'there is no freedom in art', that 'freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation'.

"Yet he also recognised a debt to the theorists of *verse libre* ('free verse') : Their good effect was not to free verse, but to quicken the realisation that there were other ways of writing it than the prevailing conventional Georgean modes. They demonstrated that the constant expectation of rhyme had 'thickened the modern ear', and no doubt helped to carry Eliot forward in his expectation that 'rhyme removed, much ethereal music leaps up from the word'. But whereas they stopped in that discovery, Eliot went further and observed that

'this liberation from rhyme might be as well a liberation of rhyme'; that once rhyme was no longer dully expected, it could then be used, for a sudden tightening-up, for a cumulative insistence, or for an abrupt change of mood'—an observation that was doubtless reinforced later by his reading of Hopkins, whose technique of sprung-rhythm has been one of the principal discoveries of poets since the First World War. What Eliot learned from the new poetry was that reaction against the erudite complexities of Swinburne's versification should lead to more form and not less. This was one of the reasons why he was stimulated to write several of the poems in his 1920 volume in the quatrains of Gauter as a corrective to the flowing excess of *verse libre*, to write a compact verse in which the mind of the poet should be actually felt to be moving.

"Thus Eliot's technical experiments are seen never to be merely imitations of other poets. As a craftsman he believes that the most satisfactory verse ever written in English, in the later plays of Shakespeare or the tragedies of Webster, broke through the conventional pattern of blank verse, often 'at the moments of highest intensity', in order to encompass necessary shade of the poet's meaning. And with this perception goes his knowledge that a man who devises new rhythms is a 'man who extends and refines our sensibility'; and that is not merely a matter of 'technique'. Eliot is aware that that there are unexplored, probably not wholly unexplorable connection between a poet's rhythm and what can loosely be called the rhythm of his age. In the light of history, it is not just a coincidence that the melodious extravagant opulence of the Spenserian stanza was devised as a reflection of the age of Elizabeth; nor than another whole age responded to the sensible *Essay on Man*. No poet is wholly conscious of attempting to make these connections; he only knows that his inner ear responds to a certain pattern of sound as being right for what he has to express. Eliot has pointed out the folly of trying to be modern by copying the journalistic details which separate the present from the past; he knows that 'one is not modern by writing about chimney pots, or archaic by writing about oriflammes'. Far deeper perceptions are required; their nature is adumbrated in Eliot's account of the auditory imagination. A further suggestion is added in his remark that 'perhaps the conditions of modern life (think how large a part is now played in our sensory life by the internal combustion engine) have altered our perception of rhythms'. These conditions lie behind the cadences of his occasional effective machine-ages:

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting

as well as behind the deliberate mechanisation of :

When lovely woman stoop to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

For this is part of the idiom, the stimulus for which came from Baudelaire, to express moments of fragile beauty in the city, but more often the overwhelming oppression of its weight. The conditions of modern life not only affect machine imagery; they lie equally behind the synocopated rhythms (altered rhythms through transferring the accent to a normally unaccented beat) of *Sweeny Agonistes* and the rich and broken music of *Ash, Wednesday*.

"And finally, Eliot's conception of the auditory imagination, his understanding of the fact that poetic rhythm by means of its power of incantation is able to renew one of the most primitive elements of man's experience at the same time that it gives expression to the last subtle nuances (delicate degrees or shades of difference) of civilised feelings, is of particular interest in throwing light on one of the most profoundly suggestive statements that he has yet made of his own aims as an artist. He was stimulated to this statement by a reflection in one of Lawrence's letters that 'the essence of poetry with us in this age of stark and unlovely actualities is a stark directness, without a shadow of a lie, or a shadow or deflection anywhere. Everything can go, but this stark, bare, rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry, to-day.' Upon these sentences Eliot has remarked :

"This speaks to me of that at which I have long aimed, in writing poetry; to write poetry which should be essential poetry with nothing poetic about it. Poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry so transparent that we should see the poetry, but that which we are meant to see through the poetry, poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem points at, and not on the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get *beyond poetry*, as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*...we never succeed, perhaps, but Lawrence's words mean this to me, that they express to me what I think that the forty or fifty original lines that I have written strive towards."

One passage that Eliot must have in mind when making these remarks is that of the bare but musical lines in the final section of *The Waste Land*, the creation of which seems to have taken rise from

his memory of the sound of the 'water dripping-song' of the hermit-thrush, thus giving another glimpse into the way in which his own auditory imagination works :

> If there were the sound of water only
> Not the cicada
> And dry grass singing
> But sound of water over a rock
> Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
> Drip drop drip drop drip drop drip drop
> But there is no water.

Poets after T. S. Eliot

T. S. Eliot dominated the English poetic scene till 1930; after that a new school of English poets came to the forefront. It is headed by **W. H. Auden,** and the other leading poets of this group are **Stephen Spender,** and **Cecil Day Lewis.** They follow the example of Hopkins and make use of the technical achievements of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. These poets are conscious of the barrenness of modern civilisation and strive to find a way out of the Waste Land. Their ideal is the creation of a society in which the real and living contact between man and man may again become possible.

The most original and the most poetically exciting among the modern poets is **W. H. Auden** who settled in America shortly before the Second World War. He also considers the Waste Land as symbolic of modern civilisation, but whereas to T. S. Eliot it is a symbol of a state of spiritual dryness, to Auden it is a symbol of the depressing physical and psychological condition in English social life. He is greatly distressed by the economic depression, mass unemployment, and the sharp cleavage between the upper and lower classes. It is the sense of the imminent crisis which pervades his early poetry.

In his later poetry Auden has given up the psychological-economic diagnosis of the troubles of the times, and developed a more sober, contemplative and religious approach to life. But he is also capable of writing light verse full of funs and ironic overtones. But whatever he writes is full of symbols and images derived not from mythology as in the case of Yeats and Eliot, but the multifarious aspects of everyday life.

Stephen Spender who began writing under the influence of Auden composed lyrics in which he expressed sympathy for the working classes.

Oh young men, oh young comrades,
It is too late now to stay in those houses
Your fathers built where they built you to breed money on money.

But in his later poetry he has developed his own quiet, autobiographical style, which is unlike the style of any modern poet :—

What I expected was
Thunder, fighting,
Long struggle with men
And climbing,
After continual straining
I should grow strong;
Then the rock would shake
And I would rest long.
What I had not foreseen
Was the gradual day
Weakening the will
Leaking the brightness away,
The lack of good to touch
The fading of body and soul
Like smoke before wind
Corrupt, unsubstantial.

Cecil Day Lewis also wrote his early poetry under the influence of Auden. But his later poetry has become more and more reflective and reminiscent. Moreover, he has adopted the Victorian diction. On account of his profound knowledge of technique he may be called the academic poet of the present age. In his poems the imagery is primarily rural and his tone is elegiac. These characteristics associate him with the Georgeans.

Other important English poets of the present age are **Louis Mac Niece, Edith Sitwell, Robert Graves, Geoff ey Grigson, George Baker** and **Dylan Thomas.** They do not form any definite group, yet there is a tendency among them to Romanticism in English poetry which had become metaphysical and classical under the influence of Hopkins, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and the Auden group of poets. They do not give so much importance to 'dry, hard' images, and being visionary rather than speculative, their presiding genius is Blake rather than Donne. **Dylan Thomas** who is the most popular of the young poets finds unity of man with nature, of the generations with each other, of the divine with the human, of life with death. Death does not mean destruction, but a guarantee of immortality, of perpetual life in cosmic eternity :

And death shall have no dominion,
Dead men naked they shall be one

With man in the wind and the west moon ;
When their bones are picked clean and clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot ;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again ;
Though lovers be lost love shall not
And death shall have no dominion.

But in spite of this tendency towards Romanticism in the poetry of the present age in England, Eliot, and his school of poetry which is akin to classicism, still hold the field. All modern poetry possesses intellectual toughness and there is no attempt to return to the melodious diction of Tennyson and Swinburne or to the imaginative flights of Shelley. Of course, the tension that we find in Eliot's poetry has ceased and the trend is towards Wordsworthian quietness.

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